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A Cultural History Beneath the Left: Politics, Art, and the Emergence of the Underground During the Cold War

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A Cultural History Beneath the Left: Politics, Art, and the Emergence of the Underground During the Cold War

by

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Dedication

To Cait, Tuli, and whoever comes next.

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A Cultural History Beneath the Left: Politics, Art, and the Emergence of the Underground During the Cold War

Sean Francis Cashbaugh, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Randolph Lewis

When critics use "underground" to describe cultural matters today, its meaning is clear: it describes something obscure, transgressive, and opposed to the "mainstream." This is a relatively recent understanding of the term. It was not used to describe cultural practices until after World War II. Before then, it denoted an imagined space linked to allegedly deviant ways of life. After the war, artists claimed this imagined space as one of political and creative possibility. By the mid-1960s, underground film, music, comics, literature, and newspapers were recognizable cultural forms with their own institutions of production and exchange, a multifaceted alternative culture known as "the underground." Both the history of "the underground" as a distinct cultural formation and the history of the idea of "underground culture" have received inadequate attention by scholars. In response, this dissertation traces the cultural history of the underground, detailing its emergence, consolidation, and collapse. In chapter one, I argue its appearance must be understood as the irruption of a political-aesthetic imaginary that valued radical social exteriority and the historical agency attributed to criminality. Chapter two explains how it first appeared in the postwar era among black ex-Communists, anti-totalitarians, and

amateur psychoanalysts who rejected Marxist proletarianism and celebrated the historical agency of criminals. Chapter three explores how white hipsters of the 1950s imagined the underground as an alternative nation organized around identities the Cold War imaginary rendered deviant: non-whites, queer people, and the allegedly mad. As detailed in chapter four, they inspired artists of the 1960s to reject dominant cultural institutions and aesthetic ideologies in the name of subterranean autonomy. They established independent institutions committed to exploring taboo subjects, resulting in their prosecution under various obscenity laws. This reoriented the underground around obscenity, and led many to embrace the obscene as an aesthetic principle. As explored in chapter five, by the late 1960s, underground institutions expanded so much that its claims to radical exteriority became untenable, leading many to question the notion and ultimately reject it. I conclude with a discussion of how the collapse of the underground enabled the emergence of the generic idea of underground culture.

Table of Contents

Preface

An unpublished short story by Ed Sanders called "The Piano Player" recounts the life of Samuel Gortz, an eccentric musician living in New York City's Lower East Side during the early 1960s.[1] As the story's narrator describes him, "His piano played such incredible melody lines that sometimes tears were the only response. He was a textbook example of a genius in America who shat upon convention, sell-out, compromise, acceptance."[2] It is as if Gortz had no interest in participating in mainstream society whatsoever, interested only in his unique little world. He did not even compose music using standard notation: he used a system of his own devising, comprehendible only to him and his friends. His talents and ethics made him popular within the local artistic scene, enough so that success seemed imminent, but he refused to participate in any capacity with any aesthetic institution. The narrator notes, "He refused to hang out in the right night clubs, to meet the right people connected with the N.Y. concert halls. Owners of bistros where he might have performed he hated. He refused to wear a suit or a neck-choke….One time he submitted to an interview. He caught a correspondent from Time taping him and threw the human out of his loft."[3] These very qualities ensured Gortz's disappearance. The story is equal parts ode and elegy. An impoverished musician, he and

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[1] Some of the material in this preface relating to "The Piano Player" first appeared in a blog post I authored for The Thomas J. Dodd Research Center at the University of Connecticut. For the original post, please see Sean Cashbaugh, "Mapping and Understanding the Emergence of the Underground," *University of Connecticut University Libraries: Archives & Special Collections Blog*, May 19, 2014, http://blogs.lib.uconn.edu/archives/2014/05/19/mapping-and-understanding-the-emergence-of-the-underground/.

[2] Ed Sanders, "The Piano Player," Manuscript, Folder 215, Box 9, Ed Sanders Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries (hereafter cited as Ed Sanders Papers).

[3] Sanders, "The Piano Player," 4-5.

any trace of his works disappeared: a leaky roof and a greedy landlord eager to evict an unpaying tenant destroyed his compositions; Gortz vanished. It was like he and his work never existed.

"The Piano Player" was originally set to appear in Sanders's 1975 book *Tales of Beatnik Glory*, a fictionalized recounting of the world of "poets, writers, painters, musicians, underground filmmakers and publishers, radicals, Freedom Riders, anti-war activists, and participants in the beat milieu" between the 1950s and 1970s.[4] Gortz never existed, though figures like him certainly did.[5] He probably resembled people Sanders knew when he was a poor artist working in New York City's Lower East Side in the early 1960s, when he was a part of what dissident artists, activists, and intellectuals called "the underground." Gortz personified many of that milieu's sensibilities, at least as they existed at their peak. His anti-commercialism, his refusal to compromise or cooperate with artistic institutions, and his insistence on remaining disconnected from the world at large were values shared by artists all across the United States. Such beliefs were core components of what it meant to "be underground," to reject large swathes of dominant culture and to try to live outside the purview of established values and morality. Such ideas had taken hold in urban spaces including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland, and Austin, to namely only a few bases of wildly creative and defiantly

[4] Ed Sanders, *Tales of Beatnik Glory* (New York: Stonehill Publishing, 1975); Ed Sanders, "Introduction," in *Tales of Beatnik Glory*, 2nd Edition (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2004), 1.

[5] Sanders makes similar claims about many of the locations that appear in the published version of *Tales of Beatnik Glory*. He writes, "Some locations in these tales, such as Stanley's Bar and the Charles Theater actually existed but others such as the Total Assault Cantina, the House of Nothingness Café, the Luminous Animal Theater, the Mindscape Gallery, the Café Perf-Po, the Anarchist Coal Collective, and of course the Aura of Health Trans-Truckstop Chow Crib should have existed, but never did." See Ibid.

oppositional political and artistic practice. Figures in such communities saw themselves as deviant artist provocateurs actively building an alternative society. Wielding obscenities like tools, they hoped to carve out a space of their own, one they imagined beneath the normal world of business and conventional middle-class morality where they could experiment with new modes of being in the world. These imagined subterraneans did all this in small magazines they produced themselves, in plays performed in coffee shops and basements, in deliberately unpolished films that were often explicitly pornographic, and in newspapers that upended conventional journalistic norms.

In a sense, "The Piano Player" is not an ode and elegy to a specific figure, but to a sensibility and the cultural scene it sustained. It is about the initial appeal and ultimate disappearance of a particular way of relating to dominant culture, of a distinct way of imagining one's own creative activities and their relationship to the various institutions that govern American cultural life. It is a lament for lost subterraneans, a dirge for the underground, which had disappeared by the time Sanders sat down to draft *Tales of Beatnik Glory* in the early 1970s. As the narrator concludes "The Piano Player," "many of those who lived on the lower east side of the 1950s and early 60s are dead, gone away opting for safety-money-'permanence,' gone nuts, gone gone gone."[6] Some like Gortz opted to embrace success, a betrayal of ideals constituting a disappearance as tragic as that of Gortz's. Others passed away, or lost their grip on reality. Consequently, the world Gortz represented faded from memory.

[6] Sanders, "The Piano Player," 7.

A Cultural History Beneath the Left: Politics, Art, and the Emergence of the Underground During the Cold War documents and explores that world, tracing the emergence and ultimate decline of what artists, activists, and intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s called "the underground," a creatively diverse political and aesthetic community that appeared alongside and at times overlapped with many of the better known movements of the era, including certain wings of the New Left, various experimental arts movements, and the so-called hippie movement. At the same time, this dissertation explicates and critiques the sensibilities that animated the underground, identifying the core principles and underlying ideologies embedded in the concept of "being underground," a notion that first reared its head in the immediate postwar era but would be abandoned by the mid-1970s when many adherents rejected it as impracticable and unrealistic. In that sense, this work is both a cultural history and a conceptual history. It details the underground's rise and fall, and suggests that this community made it possible for scholars and critics to speak of "underground culture," a now common concept used to describe obscure and transgressive subcultures and practices. This is a necessary project given that both "the underground" and idea of "underground culture" have received inadequate attention by historians and critics. Scholars have treated the underground in a piecemeal and fragmentary fashion, analyzing particular underground forms but never treating them as part of a coherent movement with a shared identity, often subsuming its various wings into a homogenous counterculture. The idea of underground culture has been treated uncritically and vaguely, deployed as an interesting adjective to append to obscure cultural practices, rather than as a historically specific

sensibility, what I will describe as a political and aesthetic logic. This work responds to such phenomena by demonstrating how and why the idea of going and being underground meant something specific to a generation of artists, detailing the origins of the idea of underground culture.

This dissertation is broadly interdisciplinary. As suggested above, the underground was a diverse creative community. It was inhabited by poets, publishers, filmmakers, playwrights, performers, journalists, and many others. For such figures, being underground denoted a particular political and aesthetic sensibility, one that traversed scholarly and disciplinary boundaries. Sensibilities resist categorization. It is difficult to name them without losing something. Consequently, I foreground the concept that the artists under study in this dissertation used to describe their own activity: underground. I take this spatial metaphor seriously and use it as an entry point for the study of a distinct mode of political and aesthetic praxis, treating it as an example of what cultural theorist Raymond Williams has famously described as a "keyword," a word indicative of "certain activities" and "certain forms of thought" that points towards "certain ways of seeing culture and society."[7] Throughout this work, I examine literature, film, newspapers, magazines, comics, and other cultural forms that artists labeled "underground" or that were produced by figures explicitly aligned with the underground, paying careful attention to the pervasive use of "underground" and all its synonyms within the rhetoric of the milieu this work focuses on. I draw on extensive archival

[7] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 15.

material, including personal correspondence, to explore the beliefs and attitudes of self-identified subterraneans.

I begin by addressing the underground as a cultural concept. Chapter one, "Welcome to the Underground: Making Sense of a Concept," sketches this dissertation's main argument in relation to its historiographical, methodological, and historical frameworks. It surveys the cultural function of the idea of the underground from the nineteenth century to the early Cold War, demonstrating that a profound shift in the concept's meaning occurred after World War II. Before then, it denoted an otherworldly criminal realm, especially with regards to race, sexuality, and class. However, in the postwar era artists and intellectuals embraced the possibilities of underground life, linking its otherworldly and criminal connotations with cultural activities. In response to the absence of scholarly attention to this shift, I offer a theoretical means of grappling with this "cultural turn." I suggest that the underground must be understood as an example of what spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre called a "representation of space" or a "conceived space" and the postwar embrace of it must be understood as the irruption of a distinct political and aesthetic logic, what some scholars have called an "imaginary." This imaginary was premised on a belief in the historical possibilities of radical exteriority and the agency of the criminal. This was a contradictory move that relied upon the logic of the culture subterraneans claimed to reject, meaning the underground always had much in common with the world it opposed, a fact most apparent in its frequent unrepentant masculinism. I suggest that the imaginary signified by the turn underground must be understood in relation to three phenomena of Cold War America: the collapse of the

institutional left, anticommunist visions of criminality and deviancy, and aesthetic debates about the fate of the avant-garde. This imaginary allowed a distinct "counterpublic" to emerge. This chapter reflects upon my methodological choices, as well as upon the political stakes in investigating the history of the underground.

The remaining chapters of this dissertation ground the largely theoretical and abstract discussion featured in chapter one in close analyses of the lives, works, and institutions of subterraneans, tracing the development of underground sensibilities and the community they sustained between the postwar era and the early 1970s. Chapter two, "Foundations: Three Undergrounds in the Postwar Era" explores how politically and intellectually diverse writers and intellectuals embraced the possibilities of underground life between the 1940s and early 1950s in response to their disillusionment with prevailing radicalisms, specifically Marxism as interpreted by the Communist Party of the United States. I explore the writings of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, anti-Stalinist intellectuals, early existentialists, and amateur psychoanalysts, all of whom embraced the underground as a realm of masculine political and creative agency as they turned away from the institutional left. Their visions of the underground resonated with one another, but they did not overlap, as different pressures and forces shaped their respective undergrounds: that of Wright and Ellison emerged via the criminalization of blackness in the United States; that of anti-Stalinists and existentialists was the result of the criminalization of independent and individual dissent by real and imagined totalitarian regimes; that of amateur psychoanalysts emerged via the criminalization of "neuroses" and "neurotics," psychoanalytic concepts used to police non-normative behaviors,

especially with regards to sexuality. Though these visions of underground possibility never intersected, they were important early manifestations of a political and aesthetic logic that would grow in stature and importance over the following decade.

Chapter three, "One Nation Underground: Containment Culture and the Spatiality of Hip, 1946-1964," explores how a generation of white hipsters laid claim to a diversely deviant underground, helping inaugurate the idea of entering *the* underground into the era's political and cultural vocabulary. In this chapter, I argue that the idea of retreating to or inhabiting the underground was central to postwar understandings of hipness among white writers, including Chandler Brossard, John Clellon Holmes, and Jack Kerouac. They envisioned what I call the "hip underground," a deviant realm similar to that imagined by writers discussed in chapter one. It served as a masculine defined space of political and creative agency that stood as an alternative to prevailing radicalisms. However, the hip underground was diversely deviant, imagined to house a broad range of allegedly criminal practices and identities, including blackness, queerness, madness, and petty crimes. Such writers did not craft this underground, but appropriated that which existed within the Cold War anticommunist imagination. Anticommunists like Whittaker Chambers, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and J. Edgar Hoover constructed a vertical topography of the nation that relegated identities and practices that did not adhere to the narrow parameters of Cold War American identity to a broadly inclusive subterranean space, a function of the range of traits they collapsed into the figure of the domestic communist. In that sense, white hipsters remained entrenched within the logic of dominant culture, a fact attested to by their use of the term underground to describe hipness: such language

never appeared in the work of black writers who first conceptualized it in the 1930s. As hip conceptions of the underground spread, it became increasingly aligned with the American nation-state, figured not as an abstract realm but as an alternative nation. I suggest that this vision of the underground as an alternative nation was the expression of a particular kind of prefigurative politics rooted in a type of American anarchism: the imagined subterranean nation heralded a new America, one shorn of its imperialist practices. I end this chapter with a discussion of the ways this underground's problematic gender politics were actively challenged within it, as can be seen in the fiction of Joyce Johnson. Her novel *Come and Join the Dance* (1960) illustrates how the underground could be wrenched from its patriarchal moorings.

Chapter four, "Four Letter Words: Underground Aesthetics and the Obscene Community in the 1960s," traces the evolution of the hip underground into what I call the "obscene community." Inspired by the example set by subterraneans the previous decade, artists working in diverse media embraced the hip underground's sense of radical exteriority. They actively rejected dominant cultural institutions like the academy, Hollywood, and museums as part of a stultifying surface world interested only in the pursuit of profit and established tastes, ultimately reinforcing alienation in everyday life. I draw upon the writings of novelist Alexander Trocchi to illustrate such ideas, and demonstrate how various arts communities embraced and enacted them. Here, I focus on underground publishing, underground poetry, underground film, and underground theater. Their shared anti-institutional attitudes laid the basis of a singular artistic sensibility to take hold. However, ideologies of hip faded as the cultural influence of

Cold War anticommunism waned. This underground increasingly aligned itself with the idea of obscenity, a consequence of the arrest and prosecution of underground artists under various obscenity charges. In classic underground fashion, they embraced the concept as a political and aesthetic principle, conceiving of it as a realm of creative and sexual freedom. I analyze the work of poets Michael McClure, Ed Sanders, and d. a. levy, as well as filmmaker Barbara Rubin, demonstrating how they embraced obscenity and pornography as aesthetic principles, paying close attention to the underlying gender politics of their obscene embrace. The "obscene community" was as masculinist as the hip underground, but not definitively. As Rubin's work demonstrates, women working within the underground pushed its will-to-obscenity beyond that which their male counterparts imagined, offering new takes on underground visions of bodily and sexual life frequently far more liberatory than those of their male peers.

Chapter five, "An End to Hostilities: New Relationships between the Underground and the Establishment," details the underground's fracture. By the mid-1970s, the community that had proudly claimed to be underground the previous decade had faded away. Many within the underground had become increasingly skeptical of the political and aesthetic possibilities of underground ideology, a direct response to the growth of underground institutions. During the late 1960s, subterraneans hoped to expand their criminal corner of the world so as to ensure their community's survival amidst financial insecurity and state repression. This proved impossible without forging clearly defined relationships with the very institutions they sought to reject. In other words, the underground's expansion made it impossible to ignore the contradictions embedded

within the concept of "going underground": it foregrounded their disavowed location within dominant culture. This process of growth ultimately reconfigured the underground's imagined location in relation to the market: no longer did it signify an otherworldly realm of possibility, but a marketing niche. In response, some subterraneans tried to retreat further underground. Most, however, abandoned their prior cultural commitments, and found new ways of relating to dominant culture. I trace this process by exploring the growth of underground institutions, including Grove Press, the Committee of Small Magazine Publishers and Editors, Liberation News Service, and the Underground Press Syndicate.

I conclude by returning to the idea of underground culture. Though the community that rallied behind the banner of subterranean had collapsed, it remained a formative influence on multiple generations of artists. I briefly explore several examples in film, music, and literature that reflect underground sensibilities. Here, I suggest that though the underground ended as a distinct community, that end made it possible for the idea of underground culture to circulate freely as a means of describing or conceiving of a type of oppositional cultural politics. In other words, the end of the underground made it possible to speak generally of underground culture.

Chapter 1 – Welcome to the Underground: Making Sense of a Concept

"And the public gets what the public wants, but I want nothing this society's got. I'm going underground." – The Jam, 1980.[8]

In early January 1966, Andy Warhol, the Velvet Underground and Nico, poet-dancer Gerard Malaga, and Warhol "superstar" Edie Sedgwick performed for a crowded room of clinical psychiatrists at the 43rd annual meeting of the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry at the Hotel Delmonico. That night, Warhol screened his films as doctors sipped cocktails and made small talk. During dinner, strobe lights flickered on and off as the Velvet Underground performed a set of dissonant, exceptionally loud, rock-and-roll songs about drug use and sadomasochism as Sedgwick and Malanga danced in front of them.[9] Malanga wore a tuxedo and suggestively played with a leather whip.[10] After their performance, underground filmmaker and critic Jonas Mekas spoke before the crowd. He and fellow filmmaker Barbara Rubin filmed the event while shouting questions at the quietly seated psychiatrists about their sexual habits and interests.[11]

Grace Glueck, writing for the *New York Times*, described the event as an "invasion," as if an alien force was forcibly imposing itself upon the straight-laced New York psychiatric community.[12] The doctors in attendance largely agreed, characterizing the performers not as artists, but as potential patients, individuals from a deranged world.

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[8] The Jam, *Going Underground*, Polydor POSP 113, 1980. 45 RPM.
[9] Grace Glueck, "Syndromes Pop at Delmonico: Andy Warhol and His Gang Meet the Psychiatrist," *New York Times*, January 14, 1966.
[10] Jonas Mekas, *Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol: Friends and Intersections*, VHS (Arthouse Incorporated, 1996).
[11] Steven Watson, *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties* (New York: Pantheon, 2003), 259.
[12] Glueck, "Syndromes Pop at Delmonico: Andy Warhol and His Gang Meet the Psychiatrist," 36.

One diagnosed it as a "spontaneous eruption of the id."[13] Another claimed he was "ready to vomit."[14] A Dr. Campbell described it as "a short lived torture of cacophony," a Dr. Harry Weinstock said that "it seemed like a whole prison ward had escaped," and an unnamed doctor suggested the performers were a threat to mental health.[15] The performers themselves described the night's events as "a kind of community action-underground-look-at-yourself-film project," characterizing their work as coming from a specific cultural sphere, one connected to the milieus that claimed the "underground" moniker: underground film and music most specifically, but also the literary underground and the nascent underground press movement.[16] Their performance that night was less an invasion, and more a collision between competing worlds.

A little more than a year later, the scene such performers came from provided the cover story for the February 17, 1967 issue of *Life* Magazine, a middle-class excursion into the home of the invaders. The cover featured a black and white close-up of Ed Sanders, identified on the cover as the "leader of New York's Other Culture."[17] Sanders was best known as one of the founders of rock group The Fugs and as publisher of *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts,* a journal featuring many of the era's best known artists, including Charles Olsen, Andy Warhol, and Norman Mailer. He was the owner of the Peace Eye Bookstore, the Lower East Side's go-to source for mimeographed literary

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[13] Quoted in ibid.
[14] Quoted in Richie Unterberger, *White Light/White Heat: The Velvet Underground Day-By-Day* (London: Jawbone Book, 2009), 75.
[15] Quoted in Glueck, "Syndromes Pop at Delmonico: Andy Warhol and His Gang Meet the Psychiatrist," 36.
[16] Quoted in ibid.
[17] *Life*, February 17, 1967.

journals and other hard-to-find literary works. The previous year, the New York Police Department raided his bookstore, confiscated many of his works, and charged him with distributing obscene and pornographic materials. Sanders would eventually beat the charges. While *Life* detailed Sanders's legal troubles, they did not print the title of Sanders's journal, nor mention the name of his band, which took their name from Norman Mailer's euphemism for "fuck" in *The Naked and the Dead* (1948).

In *Life*, journalist Barry Farrell explored the "other culture" he imagined Sanders to lead, detailing its difference from that of *Life*'s middle-class readership, people like the psychiatrists described above who might have had copies of *Life* sitting in their office waiting rooms. Farrell was alternately obsessed and disgusted with this other world and its "revolutionary proposal" of "clearing away taboos," describing it as a "wild utopian dream" home to "orgiastic Happenings and brutalities."[18] He recounts the work of "composers who refuse to compose," details Japanese pornographic art, meditates on writer Alexander Trocchi's odes to heroin, and shares his experiences with performative acts of "creative vandalism."[19] Farrell consigns such activities to "the Underground," immediately recalling the language Warhol's Factory regulars used to describe their performance at the Hotel Delmonico. Like those alarmed psychiatrists, he implied it could take over the world, claiming "a vast mosaic of Underground friendships reaches

[18] Barry Farrell, "The Other Culture," *Life*, February 17, 1967, 101, 86.
[19] Ibid., 86, 92, 95, 97, 99.

around the world, linking intentions and ideas, and putting distant people in touch with each other."[20]

Both Warhol and Farrell invoke the underground in cultural terms. This is not unusual. Today, such a conception of the underground is relatively common. It is a colloquial way of understanding a specific mode of cultural practice. Underground culture is something obscure, something politically subversive though not necessarily progressive, and something aesthetically transgressive, often toying with the deviant and obscene. It is difficult to encounter without a slew of expletives. You usually find it in bars, basements, cafes, or other venues outside "official" spaces of cultural consumption such as the university, the art gallery, or the museum. It often embodies an anti-commercial ethos, a stance marked by its stark opposition to incorporation within the mainstream marketplace of cultural goods and ideas. It describes a world inaccessible to those "aboveground," those not "with it," those not attuned to its particular languages or its styles – it is opaque, a realm of fugitives hiding in the shadows. The trope describes an imaginative space of diverse activities and practice, one self-consciously separate from the dominant cultural landscape. This is a trait is shares with many other oppositional movements – countercultural hippies come to mind – but it is qualitatively different. The underground is somehow dangerous, maybe threatening: think less acid and more heroin. It bespeaks a particular relationship to and a vision of the dominant culture and values of American society. Less of a style and more of a political and aesthetic logic, it claims a specific positionality that dwells beneath a homogenous landscape.

[20] Ibid., 86.

Such an understanding of underground culture has been common since at least the 1960s. After figures like Warhol used "underground" to describe their world, it appeared throughout the 1970s and 1980s when musicians and critics used the word to describe punk subcultures. In 1975, James Wolcott of the *Village Voice* described the fledgling music scene developing around New York City club CBGB – where bands like The Ramones, Blondie, and Television first came to prominence – as part of the "New Rock Underground."[21] Rock and roll magazines like *Bomp* and *Creem* similarly described this obscure and aggressively transgressive variant of rock music, as being "underground."[22] A younger generation of punks in Washington DC adopted the term in the 1980s, using it to describe their own distinct take on punk rock and the scene around it.[23] At the same time as punk's ascendance, some anarchists began describing their national and international network of magazine exchange as constituting "the underground."[24] In the 1990s, "underground rap" became a recognizable genre, characterized by abstract lyrics, dissonant beats, and a relative obscurity, especially compared to the mass explosion of hip-hop's popularity. By the mid-2000s, there were multiple popular videogames that included "underground" in their titles. In 2003, Neversoft Entertainment released *Tony Hawk's Underground*, a skateboarding game endorsed by professional skateboarder Tony

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[21] James Walcott, "A Conservative Impulse in the New Rock Underground," *Village Voice*, August 18, 1975.

[22] Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2002), 260–61.

[23] Cynthia Connolly et al., eds., *Banned in DC: Photos and Anecdotes From the DC Punk Underground*, Second Edition (Washington D.C.: Sun Dog Propaganda, 1989). Such uses of the word persist in reference to punk rock. See, for instance, Michael Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981-1991* (New York City: Back Bay Books, 2001).

[24] Bob Black, *Beneath the Underground* (Portland: Feral House, 1994); Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (New York: Verso, 1997).

Hawk, and Electronic Arts released *Need for Speed: Underground*, a street racing game.[25] In 2004, both videogame developers released sequels that were just as successful as their predecessors.[26] For all its oppositional connotations, the "underground" is a recognizable concept within the "mainstream," a concept deployed by those who oppose dominant culture and by corporations seeking to imbue their products with that sense of transgression that seems to sell so well.

Yet the conception of the "underground" as a distinct cultural sphere is a relatively recent historical phenomenon in the United States. It is not a universal category of cultural production, circulation, and consumption. The concept has a distinct history. If I were to magically return to the early years of the twentieth century and speak of "underground culture" to the bohemians of Greenwich Village in New York City, I would likely be met with blank stares. Well-known modernists like Marxist journalist John Reed, bohemian patron Mable Dodge, or avant-garde publisher Margaret Anderson would not have a clue as to what I was talking about. Despite similarities between the interests and practices of these bohemians and the underground I describe above – forms of sexual transgression, various modes of cultural radicalism, a strident anti-bourgeois attitude, the production of new forms of art, and the establishment of independent presses and little magazines – they never understood themselves in such terms.[27] At that time,

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[25] *Tony Hawk Underground*, Playstation 2, 2003; *Need for Speed: Underground*, PC, 2003.

[26] *Tony Hawk Underground 2*, Playstation 2 (Neversoft Entertainment, 2004); *Need for Speed: Underground 2*, PC, 2004.

[27] This description of the "American Moderns" or the "Lyrical Left" is drawn from Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000) and John Patrick Diggins, *Rise and Fall of the American Left*, 2nd Edition (New York: W. W.

"underground" had no cultural or artistic connotations.[28] Cultural producers did not embrace "underground" as a descriptor of their work or milieu until the immediate postwar era, when usages of the term rapidly proliferated in the shadows of the Cold War.[29]

The appearance of the idea of underground culture warrants explanation. This chapter begins that process. It surveys the history of the underground as a concept from the nineteenth century to the postwar moment when artists announced its relevance to culture, detailing how it functioned as both a real and as an imagined space linked with criminality and deviancy. It addresses the failure of scholars to account for the ways artists began referring to themselves as inhabiting the underground, briefly reviewing the literature on the subject before outlining an approach to understanding the underground's cultural turn. I suggest that the underground must be understood as an "imagined" or "conceived space" and the turn to it must be understood as the irruption of a distinct political and aesthetic imaginary premised on a belief in the historical possibilities of

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Norton & Company, 1992), 93–143; See also Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia: The Radicals of the Masses, 1911-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

[28] For instance, neither "underground" nor any related terms appear in Albert Parry, *Garret's and Pretenders* (New York: Covici Friede Publishers, 1933). Parry's work was a popular account of all forms of American Bohemianism. Malcolm Cowley uses the word "underground" to describe the legacy of dada in *Exiles Return: A Narrative of Ideas* (1934). He writes, "Its foremost writers, its saints, were not widely read, since their books were too difficult for the public; but they exerted a wide influence and enjoyed a tremendous underground prestige." Here, Cowley's use of "underground" is in reference to his argument that he believes they are a dead movement, and thus "under the ground," as in a grave: the title of a chapter in which that quote appears is "Discourse Over a Grave." His use of the word does not reflect its use by later artists and critics. See Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Narrative of Ideas* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1934), 157–67.

[29] The Oxford English Dictionary places the origin of the idea of a cultural underground in the early 1950s. This dissertation suggests it started slightly earlier. See "underground, Adj. and N.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed February 19, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/211700.

radical exteriority and the agency of the criminal. This chapter thereby maps this dissertation's central argument and details its overarching theoretical paradigm.

FROM GOING UNDER THE GROUND TO GOING UNDERGROUND

The first step to making sense of the cultural underground's emergence is situating it in the larger history of the underground as a concept. After all, the idea of underground culture relies on a metaphor.[30] Artists began describing their work and lives in terms of the underground because the range of meanings associated with the word and concept resonated with them. This section surveys those meanings and explores how individuals and groups in the United States related to them. Here, I suggest that World War II marks a turning point in the conceptual history of the underground. Throughout most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century to be underground was negative. The idea of the underground functioned as a means of imaginatively spatially organizing social life. It was an example of what theorist Henri Lefebvre called a "representation of space" or a "conceived space," a spatial abstraction that reinforced the social dominant order.[31] I suggest that dominant culture mobilized the figurative underground to denigrate

[30] As scholars from diverse theoretical and disciplinary traditions have argued, the significance of metaphor extends far beyond its poetic and rhetorical uses: it underwrites our interactions with and understanding of the world and each other, organizing our views of social life. See Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," trans. F. C. T. Moore, *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1974): 5–74; Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello, S.J. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Cindi Katz and Neil Smith, "Grounding Metaphor: Towards a Spatialized Politics," in *Place and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Michael Keith and Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1993), 67–83; James W. Underhill, *Creating Worldviews: Metaphor, Ideology and Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Raymond W. Gibbs, ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[31] When drawing on this concept, I will use the phrases "conceived space" and "imagined space" interchangeably.

and distance allegedly criminal identities and practice, and that those labeled in such terms rejected it. After World War II, however, a generation of artists, activists, and intellectuals embraced the idea of being underground, forging a new relationship to the imagined space by proudly claimed to inhabit "the underground." As I explore further in the following section, this is a shift that scholars have failed to attend to, part and parcel of a larger failure to consider the underground as a distinct cultural formation.

The word "underground" has referred to the physical spaces below the surface of the earth since at least the late sixteenth century, developing associations with secrecy and danger shortly thereafter.[32] The idea of the underground, however, took on new significance in the United States with the emergence and expansion of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century, which relied upon new forms of subterranean labor and space. For instance, as historian Rosalind Williams observes, its consolidation was unthinkable without the mining industry.[33] In cities, new underground spaces like sewers and subways appeared and became indispensable to urban dwellers.[34] As literary historian and critic David Pike argues, such spaces played a central role in the way urban residents imagined their immediate environment. The modern urban imaginary depended

[32] "'underground, Adj. and N."

[33] Rosalind H. Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination*, New Edition (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 51–81.

[34] Marshall Berman argues that the rise and development of urban spaces was a constituent component of modernity. See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988).

upon a conception of a "vertical city," one that existed above and below the streets city dwellers traversed in their everyday life.[35]

With the proliferation of underground spaces came a new fascination with the underground's figurative dimensions: the underground was an imaginary as much as a material space. Pike suggests underground spaces long confronted the Western world as "otherworldly."[36] It was an alluring world separate from that of everyday life. Images of such an underground appear throughout nineteenth and early twentieth century literature, especially in proto-forms of science fiction.[37] Consider the work of Edgar Allen Poe.[38] Mysterious undergrounds populate his works. The final chapters of his only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), find its central characters lost in a network of underground caverns whose walls feature unknown symbols, possibly Arabic or Ancient Egyptian. The caverns themselves are a mystery: according to the tale's supposed "editors," Pym's self-drawn map of them resembles the Ethiopian word for "to be shady."[39] In the novel's final scene its characters confront a white giant amidst a series of chasms in the Antarctic Ocean, presumed openings to a world beneath the surface of

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[35] See David L. Pike, *Subterranean Cities: The World Beneath Paris and London, 1800-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[36] David L. Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx: The Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800-2001* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 1.

[37] Consider, for instance, *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864) by Jules Verne or *The Time Machine* (1895) by H.G. Wells. On such literature, see Williams, *Notes on the Underground,* 82-215.

[38] Rosalind Williams suggests this was primarily a European phenomenon. Following the work of Leo Marx, she claims, "American writers typically develop the theme of the technological environment on the horizontal plane" rather than on the "vertical plane," where the "machine [invades] the garden" rather than burrows beneath it." Williams, *Notes on the Underground*, 18. However, there are prominent American counterexamples.

[39] Poe's novel is a frame story, presented as the found manuscript of the now lost Arthur Gordon Pym. See Edgar Allen Poe, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket," in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allen Poe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 883.

our own, a reference to the then popular "Hollow Earth" theory which held that the interior of the earth was home to new lands, advanced technologies, and mysterious creatures.[40] Popular author Edgar Rice Burroughs drew from similar ideas in his six novels and one short story collection about the land of Pellucidar, a primitive world 500 miles beneath the Earth's crust.[41]

As fascinating as they were, such underground worlds were also dangerous, dirty, and immoral, connotations long associated with the idea of the underground. Pike notes that popular discourse framed the underground as a threat: its supposed danger matched its otherworldliness. It was the netherworld, a "kingdom of death, realm of dust and decomposition and the site of the afterlife."[42] Pike attributes such attitudes to what he describes as the "vertical framework" characteristic of Western thought and myth. This framework consigns that which is below to the diabolical, a vestige of Christian theology which holds that Satan fell *down* and cultivated a disordered and chaotic world, hell, in opposition to the pure heaven *above*.[43] Throughout western culture, especially bourgeois culture, such a terrain is associated with refuse, waste, and excrement, the pollutants that, while tied to bodies, pose significant danger to it. Peter White and Allon Stallybrass, for

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[40] On the popularity of Hollow Earth Theory in 19th century America and the influence of such ideas on Poe, see David Standish, *Hollow Earth: The Long and Curious History of Imagining Strange Lands, Fantastical Creatures, Advanced Civilizations, and Marvelous Machines Below the Earth's Surface* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Books, 2006), 87–107.

[41] These works include *At the Earth's Core* (1914), *Pellucidar* (1915), *Tanar of Pellucidar* (1929), *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* (1929), *Back to the Stone Age* (1937), *Land of Terror* (1944), and the posthumously published short story collection *Savage Pellucidar* (1963). On these works, see Standish, 241-266.

[42] Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx*, 1.

[43] Drawing on the work of Michael Taussig, specifically his *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1983), Pike argues that such ideas and imagery mediate the social turbulence of capitalism's development in urban spaces, providing a discourse through which the chaotic disorder of capitalist development can be understood and contained. See Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx*, 46-59.

instance, have explored how the upper and lower dimensions of the body have served as a means by which bourgeois individuals have mapped social space, especially that of nineteenth century cities, linking human excrement and all forms of waste with the lower depths of the physical environment, rendering anything below the "surface" taboo.[44]

These various dimensions of the underground come together in journalist and children's author Thomas Wallace Knox's *Underground; or Life Below the Surface* (1873), a one thousand page tome exploring anything and everything the author could conceivably describe or link to the underground, both real and imagined. His text serves as a useful case study for understanding how the idea and iconography of the underground functioned figuratively in late nineteenth and early twentieth century American culture. *Underground* was popular, going through multiple editions in several countries, with each version slightly different than the last, as Knox included more and more material under the rubric of the underground.[45] He synthesizes the various dimensions of the real and imagined underground described above: it is morally and physical dangerous; it is hidden, but alluring; and it is central to modernity. The book's table of contents promises its readers explorations of caves all across the world, the mining industry, volcanoes, coral reefs in the Pacific Ocean, the archeological digs of

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[44] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 145; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2002); On American attitudes on this subject during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Daniel Max Gerling, "American Wasteland: A Social and Cultural History of Excrement, 1860-1920" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2012).

[45] Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx*, 25. This was the original title. Many editions of the text had slightly different titles. For reasons of availability, I will be drawing from Thomas W. Knox, *The Underground World: A Mirror of Life Below the Surface* (Hartford, CT: J. B. Burr Publishing Company, 1877). For a brief analysis of the first edition, see Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx*, 25-28.

Pompeii and Mycenæ, famous burglaries, catacombs, petroleum, wine and beer cellars, railway tunnels, Parisian sewers, dungeons, animals that live underground, subterranean housing, highway robbery, piracy, gambling, buried treasure, and war stories.[46] Some of Knox's subjects clearly connect to literal understandings of the underground, especially within the context of modernity as described above. Twenty-four of the 1877 edition's seventy-one chapters focus on mining, for instance. Chapters on sewers, dungeons, and caves similarly explore physical environments beneath the earth's surface. Other chapters relate to figurative understandings of the term: subjects like piracy and highway robbery are clearly indebted to ideas of the underground as a devilish and dangerous realm, one largely secret and unsanctioned by official society.

Knox's work illustrates how the metaphor and idea of the underground came to be used to imaginatively and rhetorically distance perceived threats to the social order. For Knox, the underground was not simply dangerous and otherworldly, it was a criminal space. His underground is home to those figures opposed to the dominant order, especially those who refuse to acquire wealth through acceptable capitalist channels. He writes, "Metaphorically, there is a great deal of underground life above the surface of the earth. Men devote time, and patience, and study to the acquisition of wealth by measures that are as far removed from the light of honesty as the tunnel the miner drives beneath the mountain is removed from the light of the sun."[47] His book links this "underground life" with that lived by petty criminals, bank robbers, pirates, and highway robbers, those

[46] Knox, 5-28.
[47] Knox, 33.

whose lives are "devious and hidden."[48] In that sense, "underground" was a close relative of the early-twentieth century concept of the "underworld," a sphere of illegal activity with its own social codes and practices.[49] In positioning such a "criminal" or "deviant" realm underground, Knox contains the threat they pose to the general sphere of social activity: life aboveground remains safe and secure.

Knox's work illustrates how the figurative underground functioned as an example of what Lefebvre describes as a "representation of space" or a "conceived space," an idealized abstraction of space produced via figures and institutions of power.[50] This sense of the word would dominate American political and cultural deployments of the underground throughout the twentieth century. For Lefebvre, imagined or conceived spaces describe particular visions of the world, and as such are always profoundly ideological: they express dominant, typically exploitive and exclusionary, relations of power, ultimately serving as the dominant representation of space within a given

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[48] Knox, 38.

[49] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "underworld" came to describe "the world of criminals or of organized crime" in the early twentieth century. See "ˈunderworld, N."; For more on this idea of "underworlds" see Heise, *Urban Underworlds: A Geography of Twentieth-Century American Literature and Culture*. The underground might also be considered a distant ancestor of the twentieth-century concept of the "underclass." The Oxford English Dictionary reports that the concept of the "underclass" in reference to "a subordinate social class" appears in sociological literature throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. See "underclass, N.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed February 20, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/211500. On the history of the idea of the "underclass," especially in American social science, see Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[50] Lefebvre defines "representations of space" as "conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent – all of whom identify what is perceived with what is conceived….This is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production). Conceptions of space tend…towards a system of verbal (and thereby intellectually worked out) signs." Here, I argue that "the underground" is part of this verbal system of signs. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 38–39. My argument here is influenced by David Pike's excellent *Metropolis on the Styx*, which offers the most comprehensive and theoretically nuanced account of the ideological function of subterranea I have encountered. See Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx*, 11–24.

society.[51] They function to produce and regulate social relations, and by consequence categorize and control figures and practices that do not accord with the dominant order. When the underground is considered in such terms, its ideological function becomes clear: it is a way to imaginatively organize the social world into acceptable and unacceptable spheres, relegating criminalized identities and practices to the latter in the name of securing the former. In that sense, figurative undergrounds are functions of various modes of criminalization, and are thus produced by dominant material and ideological practices. To label something underground is thereby to exercise social, political, and cultural power in service of shoring up dominant ideologies and institutions.

This can be seen in the degree to which subterranean criminality was frequently framed in terms of class, race, and sexuality. As multiple scholars argue, processes of criminalization are deeply ideological.[52] Knox's focus on criminal milieus brings to mind the Marxist notion of the lumpenproletariat, those rogues and vagabonds positioned below the working-class. Here, they inhabit subterranea. His chapter on the "Underground in San Francisco" specifically links that city's underground with its Chinese and Chinese-American residents, linking them with opium dens and other spaces

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[51] As Lefebvre scholar Andy Merrifield notes, "Representation implies the world of abstraction, what's in the head rather than in the body." See Andy Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 109.

[52] The literature on the ideological dimensions of "criminality" and "deviancy" is extensive. Works central to my thinking on this subject in relation to ideologies of class, race, gender, and sexuality include Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Stuart Hall et al., eds., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

of vice.[53] Muckraker journalist Will Irwin wrote similarly in 1908 of the "underground life" lived by Chinese immigrants in San Francisco, claiming they literally lived under the ground, where they conducted "dark and devious affairs" such as "the smuggling of opium, the traffic in slave girls, and the settlements of their difficulties."[54] To return to a previous example, Poe links his underground spaces to blackness: they are dark caverns beneath lands inhabited by dark people; part of their mystery lays in their connections to non-white civilizations.[55] In 1916, well-known socialist writer and gay activist Edward Carpenter used such language to describe his works and the subjects they dealt with, namely socialist politics and homosexuality. As he writes, they lived an "underground life in the literary world, spreading widely as a matter of fact, yet not on the surface," a consequence of a repressive dominant culture unwilling to accept non-normative ideas about sexuality.[56]

When the figurative underground is understood as an imagined space produced via dominant institutions and ideologies, it foregrounds the fact that those positioned underground in the nineteenth and early twentieth century had no choice in the matter. They did not see themselves as inhabiting "the underground." This can be seen in the ways those positioned in the underground or underworld rejected such labels. Claude McKay demonstrates how those positioned within the "underground" resisted such practices in *Home to Harlem* (1928), his subversive celebration of New York City's

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[53] Knox, 768-784.
[54] Will Irwin, *The City That Was: A Requiem of Old San Francisco* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1908), 43.
[55] See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 31–59.
[56] Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1916), 209.

"black underworld" during the Harlem Renaissance.[57] As the college-educated protagonist Ray considers Harlem's street life, then very much in vogue amongst white intellectuals and bohemians:

> It was what they called in print and polite conversation "the underworld." The compound word baffled him, as some English words did sometimes. Why "underworld" he could never understand. It was very much upon the surface as were the other divisions of human life. Having its heights and middle and depths and secret places even as they. And the people of this world, waiters, cooks, chauffeurs, sailors, porters, guides, ushers, hod-carriers, factory hands – all touched in a thousand ways the people of the other divisions.[58]

Ray specifically notes that is it "they" whose use the term "underworld," referring to those dictating the terms of "polite conversation": the middle-class, and specifically middle-class whites. "They" use it to imaginatively categorize the neighborhood's black working-class community, removing it from the "normal" world, that of the white middle-class.

This power dynamic is seen in another major thread of the history of the underground as a figurative concept. Those secretly resisting dominant political and social orders frequently referred to themselves as underground or as part of underground movements, drawing on the concept's associations with secret activity. For instance, Karl Marx famously conceived of proletarian revolution as an "old mole" that periodically disappeared underground only to resurface unexpectedly with the appearance of

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[57] Here, I am following Heise's argument that McKay's first novel actively deconstructs white stereotypes about Harlem and demystifies fantasies of racial primitivism that drew whites to Harlem throughout the 1920s, thoroughly reinterpreting that which constitutes the "primitive." He singles out the following passage as a key moment in the text wherein McKay explicitly rewrites the categories his central character "had used to organize his knowledge of race, class, and geography," revealing how binary concepts like the "underworld" were "radically incommensurate with the multiplicity of black urban life." See Heise, *Urban Underworlds: A Geography of Twentieth-Century American Literature and Culture*, 113–126.

[58] Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 224–25.

revolutionary situations.[59] The elements of secrecy attached to the word resonated with certain strands of radical leftist theories of revolution. Despite the massive differences in the thought of communist Vladimir Lenin and anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, both held that secret and conspiratorial activity were crucial to political organization, notions that later gained currency in the United States.[60] Sinclair Lewis's bestselling alternative history of a fascist United States *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) features a resistance group named the "New Underground." The name of the resistance group is a direct reference to the Underground Railroad, perhaps the United States' most famous subversive movement yoked to the idea of the underground.[61] Throughout World War II, the idea of underground resistance movements was most closely linked to anti-Nazi resistance movements, with the most well-known example of this would be the French Resistance, also known as the French Underground.[62] In these instances, the condition of being

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[59] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1994), 121.

[60] Vladimir Lenin's classic account of such modes of organization appear in V. I. Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?," in *Essential Works of Lenin: "What Is to Be Done?" and Other Writings*, ed. Henry M. Christman (New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 54–175. For scholarly commentary on such ideas, See Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? In Context* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 433–88. On Leninism in the United States, see Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991), 121–54.

[61] There are multiple, competing stories about the origins of the term "underground railroad." As David W. Blight recounts, one attributes the term to a slave catcher who claimed Tice David, an escaped slave, "must have gone off on an underground railroad" while another attributes it to a caught fugitive slave who, facing torture, claimed he was on his way to where "the railroad ran underground all the way to Boston." Scholars generally place its origins in the 1830s. By the 1860s, it was a term in common currency. Those working on it embraced and deployed it. See David W. Blight, "Introduction: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory," in *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory*, ed. David W. Blight (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 3.

[62] John L. Spivak, "The Underground Speaks: A Report from Germany," *New Masses* 18, no. 1 (December 31, 1935): 9–11; Wladyslaw R. Malinowski, "The Pattern of Underground Resistance," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 232 (March 1944): 126–133. The French Underground was celebrated in popular culture. For instance, in 1941, Warner Brothers released *Underground*, a B-Movie directed by Vincent Sherman recounting an anti-Nazi resistance group known only as "The

underground was not made by choice: it was an unfortunate necessity given repressive circumstances, a situation to be overcome.

A new relationship to the imagined space of the underground appeared in the early years of the Cold War, when poets, filmmakers, musicians, actors, playwrights, dramatists, and journalists all across the United States came to describe their work in subterranean terms. Unlike previous figures linked with the underground, these artists proudly announced their subterranean ties. For example, Chandler Brossard's *Who Walk in Darkness* (1952) chronicled and celebrated the appearance of the "Underground Man" on New York City's white bohemian scene and William S. Burroughs published *Junkie* (1953), a novel a then largely unknown Allen Ginsberg praised as an "archive of the underground."[63] Only a few years later, Jack Kerouac would publish *The Subterraneans* (1958), drawing upon the rhetoric of the underground to describe the new hip scene of New York City and San Francisco. One year before Kerouac published his text, film critic Manny Farber praised "underground films," cinematic works "seemingly afraid of the polishing, hypocrisy, bragging, fake educating that goes on in serious art."[64] In 1961, filmmaker Stan Vanderbeek wrote of the work of "artists, poets, experimenters in America who must work as if they were secret members of the underground," affixing

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Underground" in Germany. Reviews of the film consistently and casually used phrases such as "underground movement." suggesting the film's characterization of "the underground" would be recognizable to audiences. See Richard L. Coe, "Met's 'Underground' Gripping Film of Germany's Anti-Nazis," *The Washington Post*, July 5, 1941; "Film Review: Underground," *Variety* 143, no. 3 (June 25, 1941): 16; Philip K. Scheur, "Nazi Gestapo Kayoed in Hard-Hitting 'Underground,'" *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1941.

[63] Allen Ginsberg, "Appendix 4: Junkie: An Appreciation (1952)," in *Junky: The Definitive Text of "Junk"* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 171–74; Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*, Revised (New York: Grove Press, 1994).

[64] Manny Farber, "Underground Films," in *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies*, Expanded Edition (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 14.

the label "underground film" to their self-produced, socially transgressive, and often non-narrative films.[65] The Velvet Underground formed in 1964, inaugurating underground rock. By the mid-1960s, youth-oriented, politically conscious newspapers such as the New York City's *East Village Other* and Berkley, California's *The Berkley Barb* proudly claimed to work within the underground, providing a forum for the emergence of underground comics.

This cultural underground drew upon conventional understandings of the underground as an imagined space. Underground film, for instance, was clearly the stuff of "the underground" as writers such as Knox might have understood it. It was deliberately transgressive, featuring practices officially considered criminal and deviant. A New York City Criminal Court deemed Jack Smith's underground classic *Flaming Creature*s (1963) obscene and banned any city theater from screening it, a result of its ending, which features an orgy where, as film historian and critic Juan A. Suárez puts it, "all characters behave in blissful oblivion of traditional alignments of anatomy and gender roles."[66] Such senses of the underground appeared to merge with its aura of secrecy, its clandestine military connotations. Stan Vanderbeek's definition of underground film conceptualizes films as weapons themselves: as "explosives vivid enough to rock the status quo."[67] Underground newspapers and comics were equally "devious" and oppositional, featuring, in cartoon-form, "drugs, sex, (including accurate

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[65] Stan Vanderbeek, "The Cinema Delimina: Films from the Underground," *Film Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1961): 8.
[66] Juan Antonio Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 185.
[67] Vanderbeek, "The Cinema Delimina: Films from the Underground," 10.

drawings of penises, vaginas, and other necessary evils), shit, religion, snot, [and] politics."[68]

That is to say that these artists did not redefine the underground produced by dominant culture. That imagined space remained unchanged within American discourse. However, these artists did have a very different relationship to it than those grouped under the label in the early twentieth century. It was not a label imposed upon them by politicians, social scientists, or simply curious parties that sought to categorize and contain those groups and places that did not fit within the carefully ordered terrain of American modernity. These artists and intellectuals, often privileged in various ways, embraced it. In that sense, they inverted normative ideologies of the underground, relishing the imagined space dominant culture hoped to distance itself from. For instance, critic Malcolm Cowley, writing of the emerging Beat literary scene in 1955, noted that these writers "talked about being 'underground'."[69] That is not his language, but theirs: to borrow Knox's words, they were "devious and hidden" by choice. As the broad range of aforementioned examples suggest, it was a culturally rich and diverse world, inhabited by writers, filmmakers, musicians, artists, journalists, and activists, all of whom proudly declared that they were part of "the underground." As Allan Katzman of New York

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[68] Mark James Estren, *A History of Underground Comics*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 2012), 17. While many writers use the term "underground comix" to distinguish mainstream fare from their underground relatives, following Mark Estren, I will use the term "underground comics." Doing so highlights "underground" as a specific adjective describing a particular form of cultural production, one with its own specific history and conditions of production, "comics." It is worth comparing comics to film here: no one has ever referred described underground film as "underground flix." In the case of underground film, "underground" modifies an existing form, "film."

[69] Malcolm Cowley, "The Next Fifty Years in American Literature," in *The Literary Situation* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 241.

City's influential underground newspaper the *East Village Other* put it in 1966, "There are literally thousands of young people (artists, hippies, beatniks, pacifists, civil rightists, etc. known as the 'underground') who have, in one form or another, dropped out of the system."[70]

By the late 1960s, these understandings of the underground were fairly commonplace, so much so that even the market embraced the idea of the underground. In a sense, the positive cultural relationship forged with the idea of the underground expanded. In 1966, Grove Press, famed for publishing now canonical works of the literary avant-garde and for being on the forefront of the battle against obscenity laws, began their "Join the Underground" campaign, an advertising push for their magazine, the *Evergreen Review*. Advertisements featuring the slogan and an image of Allen Ginsberg appeared in well-known publications across the United States, including *Ramparts*, *Esquire*, *The New Republic*, *Playboy*, the *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, and the *New York Review of Books*, as well as on posters throughout the New York City Subway system.[71] By the end of the decade, anthologies of "underground writing" began appearing, cashing in on the niche literary market Grove's campaign pointed to.[72] Rock musician Frank Zappa appeared at the First International Music Industry Conference in

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[70] Allan Katzman, "Poor Paranoid's Almanac," in *The Hippie Papers: Notes from the Underground Press*, ed. Jerry Hopkins (New York: Signet Books, 1968), 90.

[71] Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 130.

[72] See, for example, Jesse Kornbluth, ed., *Notes from the New Underground: An Anthology* (New York: Viking Press, 1968); Robert J. Schroeder, *The New Underground Theatre*, Bantam Books (New York: Bantam Books, 1968); Eugene E. Landy, *The Underground Dictionary* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971); Mel Howard and Thomas King Forcade, eds., *The Underground Reader* (New York: New American Library, 1972).

1969 and gave a presentation to music industry executives entitled "Understanding the Underground Artist."[73] Zappa spoke as a self-identified "underground artist." He was by no means sympathetic to the music industry gurus at the conference, nor were they of him (they criticized his use of "four letter words"), but his inclusion there seems a far cry from the distance from mainstream society that underground long connoted.[74] This underground was a niche rather than another sphere of life.

This extensive conceptual genealogy of the idea of the underground" has been necessary in order to highlight the difference between pre- and postwar relationships to the imagined space of subterranea. This new positively defined cultural underground did not efface previous understandings of the word. Of course, it still referred to the literal spaces beneath the surface of the earth. It still figuratively worked to describe mysterious modes of deviancy and criminality: the Velvet Underground took their name from Michael Leigh's *The Velvet Underground* (1963), a detailed exposé of non-normative (read: deviant) sexual practices amongst white middle-class Americans, a fairly popular genre throughout the 1960s.[75] It still referred to clandestine military practices: the Weather Underground Organization invoked the trope when naming their revolutionary organization in 1969. However, in the postwar era, the underground became a cultural phenomenon in a way it never was before, a consequence of American artists forging

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[73] Frank Zappa, "Understanding the Underground Artist," in *The Complete Report of the First International Music Industry Conference*, ed. Paul Ackerman and Lee Zhito (New York City: Billboard Publishing Company, 1969), 89–90.
[74] Ibid., 90.
[75] Michael Leigh, *The Velvet Underground* (New York: MacFadden Books, 1963). See also, for example, Roger Jordan, *Hollywood's Sexual Underground* (Los Angeles: Medco Books, 1966); Sara Harris, *The Puritan Jungle: America's Sexual Underground* (New York: Putnam, 1969).

new positive relationships to this particular conceived space, claiming that which dominant culture decried as negative was actually positive. It came to signify a distinct community inhabited by a diverse range of cultural producers. The idea of being underground – of being clandestinely "deviant" or "criminal" – resonated with those seeking change in American life and became aligned with a particular cultural milieu. As I explore in the following section, scholars have not explored this phenomenon, nor interrogated the politics underlying it.

UNDERTHEORIZED REALMS

Few scholars have considered why artists embraced the underground in the postwar era, effectively inverting previous relationships to the imagined space of subterranea. Usually, cultural critics and scholars invoke the word underground in generic and ahistorical terms, commonly using it as a descriptor of any number of obscure and secretive subcultures or oppositional cultural practices. There are two interrelated problems with this. First, being underground meant something concrete for artists in the past. It was more than simply a vivid adjective for artists and activists to claim: it marked a certain state of mind, a way of being, and a means of locating oneself in relation to the dominant culture of postwar America. As demonstrated in the previous section, it possessed a distinct genealogy entwined with longstanding conceptions of the underground as an imagined space. Second, in failing to recognize it as a distinct concept, critics and scholars have not attended to the distinct community that rallied behind it, treating it in a piecemeal and fragmentary fashion. This section explores why a more theoretically nuanced and historically specific understanding of the underground is

necessary, explores the scholarly literature on the subject, and examines the works that do attempt to explain why artists embraced the underground in mid-century America.

Defining and theorizing the cultural underground is an important task. Scholars need to be conscious of the historicity of the concepts they deploy, especially those that seem the most abstract or commonsensical. As Marx writes famously in the *Grundrisse* on the category of labor, "even the most abstract categories, despite their validity – precisely because of their abstractness – for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within those relations."[76] As aesthetic theorist Peter Bürger notes of this passage, "The decisive distinction here is between 'validity for all epochs' and the *perception* of this general validity."[77] Just as we might identify forms of labor in many historical epochs, our ability to do so depends upon history having unfolded in specific ways that made such judgments and categorizations possible.

Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) importantly demonstrates how we can make the same claim about the category of "the avant-garde."[78] His insights here should be applied to the category of "the underground." We might identify cultural practices easily labeled underground throughout the past, but the possibility of underground being relevant to the realm of culture emerged historically. The perception of its general validity is itself a historical construction that warrants explanation. We need to ask "How

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[76] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, Reprint (New York: Penguin Classics, 1993), 105.
[77] Peter Bürger, *Theory of The Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 16.
[78] Ibid., 16–18.

did the underground come to mean what it currently does and under what conditions?" We need to explore why a generation of artists decided to "go underground" in the postwar era, adopting a positive relationship to what many saw as negative. We need to explain how those who went underground identified as a specific community. These are questions that contemporary scholars have not adequately answered.

That is not to say scholars have not explored specific undergrounds. To the contrary, the historiography of individual cultural undergrounds is extensive, especially in relation to those of the 1960s. However, they largely fail to synthesize them. It is a scholarly commonplace that mid-century twentieth century America was a major era of social, political, and artistic upheaval: the broad changes that went on during what historians have described as the "long sixties" are too numerous to adequately describe in a single book, let alone a single chapter.[79] One need only consider the flurry of political activism, reformist and revolutionary, and the vast array of experimental arts that flourished at the time.[80] The explosion of underground practices during this era fit clearly within this framework. However, while scholars have written extensively about various

[79] In "Periodizing the 60s," Fredric Jameson argues that what we characteristically describe as "the 60s" characterizes a period stretching from the mid-to-late 1950s to approximately 1973, when the United States military pulled out of Vietnam, essentially a transition between modernity and postmodernity. He writes, "We have described the 60s as a moment in which the enlargement of capitalism on a global scale, simultaneously produced an immense freeing or unbinding of social energies, a prodigious release of untheorized forces." See Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," in *The 60s Without Apology*, ed. Sohnya Sayres et al. (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1984), 208.

[80] For a synthetic account of this "sixties," see Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). On the multiple, at times overlapping, reformist and radical political movements of the era, see Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). On the range of aesthetic experimental practices, see Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1998).

forms of underground culture – underground film, music, newspapers, and comics – the connections between them have received less attention, have been considered secondary, or have been ignored entirely. For instance, in the 1970s, multiple critics began exploring and anthologizing poets they considered "underground," and while they frequently acknowledged the existence of a mass underground culture in the United States, their works focused on poetry exclusively and did not consider relationships to film or performance.[81] Similarly, there are multiple works that explore the history of underground newspapers, but they almost never mention any other forms of cultural production that claimed to be underground, despite the fact that these ignored forms of cultural production often supplied much of the their content.[82] Various books about underground comics make reference to the underground press that fostered their popularity, but never to underground film or literature.[83] The scholarly literature on underground cinema is expansive. However, save for a few exceptions, most notably the

[81] Hugh Fox, *The Living Underground: A Critical Overview* (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1970); Hugh Fox, ed., *The Living Underground: An Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry* (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1973); Samuel Charters, *Some Poems/Poets: Studies in American Underground Poetry Since 1945* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1971).

[82] Accounts of the underground press largely focus on its political dimensions, focusing on it in relation to the New Left and other youth-oriented political movements of the late 1960s. This is an important area of focus, but this dissertation contends that they must be situated within a larger subterranean community. For examples of this phenomenon, see John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robert J. Glessing, *The Underground Press in America* (Bloomington: University Press, 1970). Abe Peck's *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) briefly touches on underground comics, see pages 154-156.

[83] On the history of underground comics, see Estren, *A History of Underground Comics*; James Danky and Denis Kitchen, *Underground Comics: The Transformation of Comics into Comix* (New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2009); Patrick Rosenkranz, *Rebel Visions: The Underground Comix Revolution, 1963-1975* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2002).

work of film scholar David E. James, this scholarship rarely looks beyond the realm of film.[84]

There are a few exceptions to this trend, most notable of which is the work of novelist and literary theorist Ronald Sukenick.[85] His memoir *Down and In: Life in the Underground* (1987) explores and theorizes the emergence of the underground as a diversely creative milieu. Covering the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, his work importantly conceives of the underground as an urban-based heterogeneous creative community, home to hip novelists, vagabond poets, dissident critics, experimental filmmakers, and oddball musicians, all joined by a shared sensibility and imagined

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[84] See, for instance, Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1967); Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History* (Da Capo Press, 1995); P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000*, Third Edition (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2002); Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, & Superstars*; Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Exploding Eye: A Re-Visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema, 1943-71*, Second Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). There are, of course, prominent and important exceptions here. David E. James's *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) and *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005) explore connections between experimental and underground film, and concurrent artistic movements, such as the Beats and minimalist sculpture. Jack Sargent's *Naked Lens: Beat Cinema* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2008) explores similar territory, connecting Beat literature with the work of many underground filmmakers. Duncan Reekie's *Subversion: The Definitive History of Underground Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), while largely focused on European filmmaking cultures, does connect American underground film to forms of youth culture, including Beat literature, jazz, and rock music. See pages 133-145.

[85] Literary critic Penny Vglaopolous's dissertation, *Voices from Below: Locating the Underground in Post-World War II American Literature* (2008), for instance, explores what she calls "imaginative representations of the underground." Her work focuses on literature, and does not engage with the larger cultural underground under study in this dissertation. Nevertheless, her work is significant in that it identifies "underground" as an "organizing principle in our cultural consciousness," linking it with transnational conceptions of national identity. See Penny Vlagopoulus, "Voices from Below: Locating the Underground in Post-World War II American Literature" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2008). James Braxton Peterson explores similar terrain in relation to African American culture, especially in relation to hip-hop. His work follows a different genealogy of the underground that overlaps at times with my own. See James Braxton Peterson, *The Hip-Hop Underground and African American Culture: Beneath the Surface* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). On Sukenick's work, see Matthew Roberson, ed., *Musing the Mosaic: Approaches to Ronald Sukenick* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

location beneath the American surface. His definition of that sensibility is worth quoting at length:

> A cultural underground sustains the distinction between artistic achievement and worldly success….the underground audience of peers and hip critics may not be disinterested, but it probably provides the most authentic consensus today for artistic success as such in a culture increasingly dominated by commercial factors. This is in part because an underground calls into question rather than reinforcing them. An underground is neither necessarily a physical place nor a particular life style, but precisely this mutinous attitude. It is an attitude conspired in by dissidents inside the establishment and those at its fringes, without participating in the dependent duet with the middle class called alienation. A true subterranean feels no remorse about his divorce from the middle class, which was not a matter of alienation but enthusiastic choice.[86]

Sukenick's vision of the underground resembles colloquial definitions of the concept. For him, a cultural underground describes a particular way of relating to mainstream, bourgeois America. This is a consciously hostile relationship: individuals willfully abandon American norms and institutions in favor of subterranean ones that form the basis of an alternative, unalienated community.

He traces the emergence of this underground to the moment of conceptual change I identify in the previous section. He suggests the embrace of the underground was rooted in a type of capitalist alienation endemic to postwar America. He describes the underground as "a class of outsiders experimenting with an idea of the good life beyond stable middle-class constraints."[87] Rather than embrace success like they were told to, they fled to the underground, "inclined to waste their lives and get on with it, to embrace failure at the start and opt for excitement over security" but upon entrance to this space

[86] Ronald Sukenick, *Down and In: Life in the Underground* (New York: Collier Books, 1988), 240.
[87] Ibid., 27.

were "confronted with the promised land of previously repressed impulses, a risky new underground landscape to explore consisting of everything deemed unreal by the dominant culture."[88] For Sukenick, subterraneans hoped to escape the American project of capitalist expansion, hiding beneath what historian Alan Brinkley describes as "the smooth surface of postwar middle-class culture," crafting a world with its own practices, values, and ethics distinct from those of the market.[89]

Sukenick's vision of the underground is an important scholarly intervention, one that has largely gone ignored.[90] However, his work is limited in several respects. First, his book is a memoir rather than a scholarly text. While it contains a wealth of historical detail, it is more interested in mapping social relationships within the underground than in situating the community and its ideas in a larger intellectual and political context, something I have suggested is necessary in order to properly historicize it. Second, it does not consider the political stakes or the ideological dimensions of the flight underground. As suggested in the previous section, the embrace of the underground meant embracing dominant constructions of that imagined space as criminal, a potentially problematic move given that many of the figures I have cited above were not criminals nor criminalized by the state. As I demonstrate in the following section, any account of the

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Alan Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), 71.

[90] Sukenick's work is frequently cited as a reference for scholarly works on 1960s arts movements, but his insights are rarely incorporated into methodological or historical frameworks. Stephen J. Bottom's *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off Broadway Movement* (2004) is a notable exception to this trend. He uses Sukenick's definition of a cultural underground to frame his analysis of off-off-Broadway theater, also known as underground theater. His work does not explore other underground art forms. See Stephen J. Bottoms, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 11–15.

cultural underground and its animating ideology must grapple with such issues. Nevertheless, Sukenick's work is a necessary starting point for any study of mid-century American arts associated with the underground.

THEORIZING THE UNDERGROUND

A Cultural History Beneath the Left: Art, Politics, and the Emergence of the Underground During the Cold War builds upon and complicates Sukenick's work, and fills the scholarly gap in the history of the underground as a cultural concept. It maps and explores the processes by which the underground came to exist as a distinct sensibility and community in the United States, detailing how and why it developed when and as it did. It explores a shared political and aesthetic sensibility and the material origins of that sensibility. To analytically capture this complex set of practices, I rely upon an understanding of the underground as a "conceived" or "imagined space" and upon what contemporary theorists describe as "imaginaries" or "social imaginaries." I argue that the conceptual shift and expansion of the underground in the postwar era signaled the irruption of what some scholars have described as a "radical imaginary." An imaginative and material project produced by a variety of cultural practices and forms dispersed across the United States, it came to describe what theorist Michael Warner describes as a counterpublic, one defined in opposition to that of the dominant culture that was ultimately known simply as "the underground." While it overlapped with similar oppositional movements, including certain wings of the New Left and the famed hippie counterculture, it was its own entity reliant upon its own understanding of cultural

opposition and change. This section surveys these dynamics, sketching this dissertation's main argument, as well as its theoretical and historical framework.

I argue that when postwar artists fled underground, they embraced a distinct way of thinking about political and cultural opposition. As such, the embrace of the imagined space of the underground is best understood as the irruption of a radical imaginary. The idea of an "imaginary" warrants some explication.[91] Rhetorical theorist Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar describes an imaginary as "the enabling but not fully explicable symbolic matrix within which a people imagine and act as world-making agents."[92] As political theorist Charles Taylor writes, the concept of a social imaginary "incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of one another, the kind of common understandings which enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life."[93] An imaginary constitutes a cultural ethos, a logic according to which the production of images and meanings takes shape for people within a given social context. It encapsulates the background information that enables individuals and groups to imaginatively map social space such they can position themselves in relation to others, to

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[91] This idea of an "imaginary" has been of recent interest to cultural theorists, cultural historians, and anthropologists. Cornelius Castoriadis offers the foundational text on the nature and function of "imaginaries" in social life. See Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998). For more on the history of the concept, see Claudia Strauss, "The Imaginary," *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 322–44; Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, eds., *The Politics of Imagination* (New York: Birkbeck Law Press, 2011); Max Haiven, *Crises of Imagination, Crises of Power: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 217–55.

[92] Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 1.

[93] Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 106; See also Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

institutions, and to other sites of power.[94] Easily transformable, imaginaries can also take on independent existences, embedding themselves within the organizing structures and discourses of social life, structuring overlapping and contradictory practices, discourses, and institutions.[95] They consequently link fields and social groups whose relationships might not be readily apparent, allowing diverse practices to resonate with each other.[96] They might do so in ways that reinforce dominant social relations, or in ways that radically oppose them. A "radical imaginary" would be one that breaks with the dominant imaginary, inaugurating, in the words of political theorist Simon Tormey, a new "sense of what it is to be radical, what it means to confront the world as it is."[97] It describes neither a political program nor dogma, but a particular affective and intellectual understanding of what constitutes radical opposition and how political actors engage in that opposition.

I argue that the imaginary signified by the embrace of the underground hinged on a belief in the political and aesthetic possibilities of radical social exteriority, an ultimately contradictory formulation given that postwar artists understood this exteriority in terms of the imagined space of the underground. As Sukenick suggests, postwar artists and intellectuals embraced the idea of going underground because they believed it afforded opportunities the aboveground world did not. This was a function of its

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[94] Ibid, 109.

[95] Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction," 4.

[96] Cornelius Castoriadis, "Imaginary and Imagination at the Crossroads," in *Figures of the Thinkable*, trans. Helen Arnold (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 80.

[97] Simon Tormey, "From Utopian Worlds to Utopian Spaces: Reflections on the Contemporary Radical Imaginary and the Social Forum Process," *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 2, no. 5 (2005): 394–95. See also Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 369–73. On the "radical imagination" as a concept, see Haiven, *Crises of Imagination, Crises of Power: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons*, 217–55.

association with criminality. As demonstrated in the previous section, the underground had long signaled criminal exteriority. In linking themselves with such a world, postwar artists hoped to imaginatively remove themselves from what they perceived as an alienating dominant culture. In this framework, criminals have a degree of agency others do not by virtue of their position outside mainstream society. However, if the underground signified an imagined space as Lefebvre defined it, it means this imagined space of agency only existed if one accepted the ideological assumptions of dominant culture. Since the underground was the imagined space in which institutions of power situated criminalized non-normative practices and identities, those who elected to enter that space accepted dominant culture's spatial logic and the vision of criminality it produced. Though they claimed to live and work in an imagined space defined by radical exteriority, subterraneans were always firmly within dominant culture. This means that despite its "mutinous attitude" towards dominant culture, it had much in common with it, a fact seen mostly clearly in a frequent and unrepentant masculinism that characterized much subterranean activity throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The idea of the cultural underground was always contradictory, a fact that would contribute to profound changes in the meaning of the concept in the early 1970s when such contradictions became impossible to ignore.

The history of the cultural underground is thereby entwined with the institutions and ideologies it sought to reject. The imaginary signified by the turn to and embrace of subterranea can only be understood in relation to the history of Cold War America, specifically between the immediate postwar era and the early 1970s. Three phenomena in

particular shaped the underground's vision of criminality and exteriority. First, the embrace of criminality and the possibilities of underground life was a reaction to the fragmentation of the established Left, namely the ideologies and institutions of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA). Second, the embrace of the underground was a refutation and symbolic inversion of the logic of Cold War anticommunism, which shaped the underground's understanding of criminality by determining who and what was permitted within the dominant space of the nation. Third, it was a rejection of prevailing aesthetic paradigms, which lead subterraneans to forge their own artistic path.

The declining prominence and power of the CPUSA prompted the initial embrace of underground ideology. After World War II, the rise of anticommunism and increasing pressures to reject any semblance of Stalinism among Marxists and former Communists led to a crisis of political identification amongst leftists, pushing many toward surrogate political commitments. Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, many embraced liberalism or other forms of American individualism. Some began identifying as progressives. Others turned to psychoanalysis or existentialism as means of explaining social phenomena.[98] The search for new historical agents of social change characterized this process, as activists turned away from traditional Marxism's allegiance to "the worker." They identified and at times appropriated figures such as the student, the un-alienated individual, and the African American civil rights activist as those who would produce

[98] See Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left From the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Alan M. Wald, *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

social change. As explored in chapters two and three, the postwar embrace underground emerged alongside and through these processes: it signified a surrogate form of radicalism that emerged in the wake of the Old Left's collapse. Subterraneans rejected Marxist proletarianism in favor of celebrating the historical agency of the criminal Other, a figure they imbued with political and creative power.

In addition to rejecting Marxist valuations of the worker as the primary agent of historical change, subterraneans rejected Marxism's logic of historical and political development. Subterraneans embraced what is best described as a prefigurative politics. Recalling the notion of a criminal underworld, one replete with its own social codes, practices, and ethics, the underground of the late 1950s and 1960s sought not to transform culture as it currently existed, but to drop out and forge a society removed from that of the mainstream and organized around that which dominant culture rendered criminal. While the Old Left, especially in its Popular Front incarnation, sought to "structurally transform" existing political and cultural institutions, the underground worked to establish its own institutions and spaces, a separatist move akin to that of the burgeoning commune movement or certain strands of "bomb shelter culture" that imagined entirely new worlds emerging underground in the aftermath of nuclear apocalypse.[99] Subterraneans did not seek to advance culture in a specific direction (such as towards a communist future). Rather, they hoped to carve out a cultural sphere that prefigured the

[99] Here, I am drawing on Michael Denning's argument about the Popular Front and its cultural dimension, the Cultural Front. See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998); on bomb shelter culture, see Kenneth D. Rose, *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 113–150.

type of society they hoped to live in, a position that aligned the underground with certain strands of American anarchism, a relationship I elaborate on in chapters three and four. To complete such a project, it was necessary to build autonomous institutions to serve the needs of this emerging underground. This occurred throughout the 1960s: underground poets founded independent presses, underground filmmakers established film co-operatives; playwrights began performing their work in nontraditional venues such as coffeehouses, lofts, and bars, spaces also utilized by musicians.

This prefigurative and separatist impulse was by no means novel: it is a longstanding political strategy, one especially common throughout the 1960s. One need only think of the era's flourishing commune movement.[100] However, the underground enacted this impulse in a distinct manner. A brief comparison between what I am describing as underground and the hippie movement illustrates this. The underground's urge to "drop out" immediately recalls Timothy Leary's by-now cliché proclamation to "Turn on, tune in, drop out," a hippie slogan if there ever was one, raising an important question as to the difference between what I am describing and what is conventionally understood as "the counterculture." Theodore Roszak famously introduced the term in 1968 to describe the then booming youth movement, linking together student radicals and their hippie counterparts via their joint rejection of the Cold War's technocratic society and their impulse to remake it.[101] The underground predates this "counterculture" by at least fifteen years, emerging in the early 1950s rather than the mid-to-late 1960s. More

[100] See Timothy Miller, *The 60's Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999).
[101] See Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

importantly, there were qualitative differences between the underground's and the counterculture's primary modes of metaphorically "dropping out," one a brief comparison between their different approaches to recreational drug use clarifies. Timothy Leary advocated the use of LSD as a means of consciousness expansion, an idea promulgated throughout the various modes of psychedelic practice prevalent in the counterculture, a fact Roszak notes in his work.[102] Burroughs's 1953 *Junkie*, a text Ginsberg described as "an archive of the underground," explores heroin and amphetamines, drugs crucial to the aesthetics of groups like the Velvet Underground in the mid-to-late 1960s. [103] As Sterling Morrison of the Velvet Underground recounts, "The whole LSD scene on campus is foreign to our sound."[104] The underground had no interest in consciousness expansion as Leary would have it, and would rather explore new forms of bodily experience that could not be found in hippie psychedelia. This suggests each possessed a distinct sensibility and attitude towards "dropping out," and while they might have overlapped in later years, they were separate impulses.

While alienation from American Marxism pushed artists and intellectuals towards an embrace of criminality, the dominant imaginary of the Cold War shaped what figures and practices subterraneans understood as criminal. The underground appropriated and claimed that which Cold War culture positioned as deviant and later as obscene. American anticommunism in the postwar years framed communist subversion as a pervasive domestic threat. However, communism's influence and presence was not

[102] See ibid., 155–78.
[103] Ginsberg, "Appendix 4: Junkie: An Appreciation (1952)," 174.
[104] Quoted in Victor Bockris and Gerard Malanga, *Up-Tight: The Velvet Underground Story* (New York: Omnibus Press, 2002), 88.

readily discernable, being hidden inside the nation, with its traces expressed implicitly in the realm of everyday life.[105] Cold War intellectuals and policy makers saw this invisible threat as inhabiting the "communist underground," a distinct imaginary space hidden within, or perhaps below, the nation, always threatening to undermine America and American Values. This space was occupied by far more than communists: the dominant imaginary of the early Cold War linked political radicalism with a broad array of practices and identities marked as non-normative by the state and Cold War culture, including madness and neuroticism, anything considered non-white or queer, and organized crime. Such ideologies became hegemonic, buttressed by the American postwar abundance, what Lizabeth Cohen has described as the "consumer's republic."[106] However, at the same time white hipsters like Chandler Brossard and John Clellon Holmes claimed the underground imagined by anticommunists as a realm of individual and social possibility, heralding it as a national community of deviants that could reinvent the American nation.[107]

The close relationship between this hip underground and that constructed in the Cold War imaginary foregrounds the contradictory and problematic elements of the postwar flight underground. It highlights how the subterranean embrace of criminality was largely a function of privilege, a means of attaining "prestige from below" in the

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[105] Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*, Revised Edition (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 113–21.
[106] See Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).
[107] Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 16.

name of social rebellion.[108] The emergence of the underground and the celebration of the "underground man" by writers like Brossard in the immediate postwar era were in many ways exploitive, a phenomenon specific to writers and intellectuals who fled to the underground from the privileged sphere of white middle-class America, utilizing the space to construct and reinvent forms of masculine agency not all that different from the patriarchal structures of authority they claimed to oppose. Upon entry, where they cultivated identities strategically calculated to subvert the norms of mainstream America, they found those who had little choice but to inhabit the underground, figures their political and aesthetic imaginations romanticized and instrumentalized in the production of their own oppositional identities and milieu.

Yet the underground's rise and consolidation were not always a matter of exploitive appropriation: such an account would be reductive. Those engaged in its production were often seen as criminal in the eyes of the state, and suffered the consequences, facing censorship, legal prosecution, and political repression. Underground cinema, for instance, was often a queer cinema in subject matter and in practice, prominently featuring non-normative sexualities and fostering queer communities and spaces, factors that led to the prosecution of many underground

[108] George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1990), 120. As Grace Elizabeth Hale has recently argued, the figure of the "outsider" occupied a central place in the imagination of the postwar white middle-class, serving as a means by which the socially privileged cultivated "authenticity" in the face of an alienating mass society. See Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

filmmakers for obscenity.[109] The publishers of underground literature encountered similar charges. Members of the underground press faced police reprisals for publishing pieces critical of the state.[110] While the underground signaled a distinct political and aesthetic logic, as an imaginary it could be detached from its at times exploitive origins and repurposed. It became a floating signifier of radical possibility, mediating social life in a diverse number of ways. This was most evident when it came to the underground's patriarchal assumptions: while underground ideology was often rigidly masculinist, women working within the underground frequently pushed it to its limits, carrying its obsession with criminality to places their male counterparts could not imagine. The creation of the underground was thereby the creation of a space in which various forms of subversive behaviors and practices could flourish.

As I explore in chapter four, the underground's turn away from leftist paradigms and its embrace of Cold War era definitions of criminality produced an aesthetic vision distinct from that of other artistic movements, namely the avant-garde. Subterraneans were as disillusioned with mainstream cultural institutions – including universities, museums, Hollywood, and well-known commercial publishers – as they were with leftist political institutions and the American nation-state. Such institutions were part of the alienating surface world that, as far as the underground was concerned, produced pale imitations of art. Subterraneans hoped to create deviant and obscene arts, ones produced

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[109] Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, & Superstars*, 87–180; Janet Staiger, "Finding Community in the Early 1960s: Underground Cinema and Sexual Politics," in *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 125–60.
[110] Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 183–204.

in underground institutions that gave expression to the sort of world they hoped to live in. In that sense, they had no interest in developing established aesthetic trends, forms or traditions, an impulse that separated them from the avant-garde as it was understood at the time. As Clement Greenberg wrote in 1947, "The avant-garde…believes that history is creative, always evolving novelty out of itself. And where there is novelty, there is hope."[111] Such a position fetishizes novelty and formal innovation in a linear model of progression.[112] The avant-garde model of development was fundamentally Hegelian: its sense of "the new" emerged dialectically *within* and ultimately *against* a specific aesthetic and cultural tradition: modernist avant-garde movements like surrealism emerged out of and in response to previous movements.[113] Subterraneans sought to escape that tradition, forging a new timeline, so to speak, and ultimately a new culture that the underground prefigured. They posited a radical spatial and temporal break with material and ideological aesthetic institutions as they understood them. The word underground itself captures this sense of exteriority: it exists below the world where avant-garde development occurs.

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, the underground ideology forged in relation to the above-described contexts circulated in small periodicals, novels, poetry, film, and other cultural forms, so much so that the language and ideas of the underground became increasingly common amongst a specific milieu of oppositional artists, activists, and intellectuals. That is, this nascent conceptualization of the underground as a deviant

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[111] Quoted in Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 118.
[112] Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art,* 154-163.
[113] Bürger, *Theory of The Avant-Garde*.

or criminal space of cultural dissent, critique, and production resonated with cultural producers dissatisfied with the existing array of viable oppositional political and aesthetic ideologies and communities. This enabled it to become a full-fledged political and aesthetic positionality. This was when artists and activists appended the label "underground" to their work, when underground film, literature, comics, and music became recognizable cultural forms. Such forms circulated first on the local level, in cities like New York and San Francisco, and later on the national level. Nationally distributed journals like Ed Sander's *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* and countless underground newspapers forged networks of communication that linked the very different underground scenes from across the nation. Organizations like the Committee of Small Press Magazines and Editors (COSMEP) and the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) formalized these ties. The underground of New York City was different than that of San Francisco or Chicago, for instance, but they existed in relation to each other, producing a national sense of the underground, one that was fractious and at times incoherent, but nevertheless recognizable as its own milieu. All of this helped consolidate the notion of underground culture – more specifically of "*the* underground" – so much so that by the late 1960s, it was a recognizable sphere of cultural production, circulation, and exchange, meaning artists and activists could refer to it with the assurance that their comrades, known and unknown, would fully understand what they were getting at.

In other words, by the late 1960s, "the underground" constituted a distinct counterpublic.[114] Enough people had embraced the imaginary the underground signified to form a distinct community. As Michael Warner argues, a public is a self-organized discursive space that fosters real and imagined relationships among strangers. It is both personal and impersonal, addressing both particular individuals and larger groups: to be addressed as a member of a public is to be recognized as a single addressee among many others. Members of a public actively attend to such addresses, meaning a public's existence is contingent upon its member's activity: their attention to it, their circulation of its constitutive elements, and their recognition of it as a circulating entity.[115] Most importantly, publics invoke and produce the worlds they claim to speak from and to: as Warner writes, "All discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, projecting for that world a concrete and livable

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[114] The scholarly literature on the idea of "the public" and "public sphere" is extensive. For classic accounts see John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1954); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989). Habermas's account is of note given his conception of the bourgeois public sphere is contingent upon the circulation of discourse in the forms of newspapers and public conversation (in coffeehouses, tea rooms, and the like), dynamics readily apparent in the consolidation of the underground as a distinct public. On the notion of counterpublics, see Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80; Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). For a scholarly overview of the existing literature on the idea of the public, the public sphere, counterpublics, and their relation to politics, see Francis Cody, "Publics and Politics," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 37–52. John F. Cline has made an argument similar to my own here, describing underground music and its constitutive practices as a counterpublic. However, his argument explores the theoretical and historical emergence of musical practices autonomous from the capitalist marketplace, polemically relying upon his own definition of "underground" as a cultural practice featuring such a trait. He does not interrogate his vocabulary and does not explore how the concept itself emerged, largely ignoring the extensive discourse surrounding the "underground," nor does he trace the ways historical actors deployed it, two things this dissertation aspires to. See John F. Cline, "Permanent Underground: Radical Sounds and Social Formation in 20th Century American Musicking" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2012).

[115] See Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 49–84.

shape, and attempting to realize that world through address."[116] That is, publics define themselves, projecting specific senses of social life that their circulation seeks to realize. A counterpublic engages in such processes, but with important qualifications: they are cognizant of their subordinate status, speaking to audiences presumed to be predisposed to the world they invoke and cultivate, and point towards, if not realize, transformative worlds conducive to new modes of sociality.[117]

The underground tended to display these traits. As an imaginary, it brought likeminded strangers together, though most of its inhabitants never met each other, bonded only by their joint identification as members of the underground. The underground was not simply an abstract formulation, it was a sphere of circulation consciously produced and maintained by its members: they defined it through works of art, journalism, and the physical act of their congregation. They created institutions dedicated to insuring that community survived. In doing so, they constructed a social world premised on supposedly deviant or obscene social practices and relations, a mirror world of sorts to that projected by the material and ideological structures of power in the United States. It was a self-consciously produced counterpublic in that it was, from the start, an imagined alternative: it celebrated its subordinate status, relishing it as a sphere of authenticity in an otherwise inauthentic world.

It was its consolidation as a counterpublic that enabled the notion of a cultural underground to circulate as a distinct entity, a process that brought it into view for all to

[116] Ibid., 81.
[117] Ibid., 86–89.

see, but also one that enabled it to be recognized by the market it sought to avoid. As I demonstrate in chapter five, this contributed to the community's fracture and subterraneans ultimate abandonment of underground ideology. If the underground denoted a space of radical exteriority, its expansion and consolidation made such claims seem hollow. Its growth made its foundational contradictions impossible to ignore, prompting debate within subterranean circles about their community's collective identity. Many chose to abandon it, and the term became detached from the community that once sustained it.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ABOVE AND BELOW

By focusing on the underground as a distinct imaginary and counterpublic, I offer a new vision of political and aesthetic activity in the 1950s and 1960s. This approach foregrounds new types of relationships between temporal and spatially disparate communities. In that sense, it has distinct advantages over other ways of analyzing collectivity, revealing ties between communities typically treated in isolation that other methodological choices and modes of framing obscure. Furthermore, in taking the concept and oftentimes simply the word "underground" as a starting point, it foregrounds vernacular forms of imagining cultural dissent and political possibility. Imaginaries are not necessarily forged in academic institutions or by conventional intellectuals. After all, the story of the underground defiantly took place outside such institutions. This section details the advantages of this dissertation's method and explores what is at stake in rethinking the 1950s and 1960s today.

The understanding of the postwar underground as a distinct political-aesthetic imaginary that enabled the production and consolidation of a counterpublic has a number of advantages. First, it offers a framework in which the various self-identified underground movements of the 1960s can exist in clear relation to each other without effacing the differences between them. It is not my intention to impose consensus on a diverse community, to identify an underground variant of the then popular project of "consensus history" advocated by scholars like Richard Hofstrader, though certain members of the underground certainly might have described their cultural sphere in such terms.[118] Neither imaginaries nor publics as I have conceptualized them rely upon fixed forms or content. Imaginaries are symbolic matrices in which a variety of practices, sometimes divergent ones, can exist in relation to each other, while publics describe modes of collective identification dependent on specific networks of communication and exchange. Underground literature, film, publishing, comics, and music were not the same in form or content, though they certainly overlapped at times. Nevertheless, their subjects resonated with each other: they shared aesthetic impulses, were critical of the same ideas and structures, and circulated throughout the same networks. In short, they were facing the same objects, oriented towards Cold War America in the same fashion.

It is for these reasons I have not deployed conventional scholarly categories for analyzing collectivity, specifically subcultural theory. As Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn Harris note in *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* (2005),

[118] On Richard Hofstrader's relationship to this approach, see Daniel Joseph Singal, "Beyond Consensus: Richard Hofstrader and American Historiography," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (October 1984): 976–1004.

"subculture" itself has been revised over and over again since the 1980s, a response to its lack of attention to fluidity and hybridity, as well as its tendency to treat subcultural formations as closed and impermeable.[119] That is, subcultural theory tends to efface difference, homogenizing the participants and constitutive elements of a given collective, imposing consensus among a fractious community. Additionally, while the tradition of subcultural studies provides key insights, the concept of the underground seems far too broad to be discussed in terms of subculture. At its very base, an imaginary denotes not a particular group, but a particular logic and perspective on society. This, of course, is a key component of any subcultural formation. A subculture would not emerge if its participants did not adhere to the same system of meaning making, if it didn't have its own language. Yet these phenomena are not equivalent and scholars cannot conflate them: wildly different subcultures, groups, milieus, or concepts can share the same imaginary. For instance, according to critical theorist Cornelius Castoriadis, capitalist and Marxist ideologies emerged out of an imaginary indebted to the industrial revolution, as a similar drive towards rationality animated each.[120] That is not to say they are the same or in any way equivalent, but it is to say they exist within the same matrix of signification.

Furthermore, scholarly categories like counterculture and subculture tend to efface vernacular forms of understanding sociality. The overreliance upon such categories, especially counterculture, has produced an inadequate account of the American 1950s and 1960s, the latter being one of the most mythologized decades of the

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[119] Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris, eds., *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
[120] Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 60.

twentieth century.[121] As cultural historian Nadya Zimmerman writes, this era was "populated by varied, heterogeneous groups, many of whom had nothing to do with one another, even within the smaller circles of the budding youth culture."[122] The scholarly reliance upon concepts like counterculture and the popular fascination with "the counterculture" effaces such heterogeneity in the name of a reductive mythologizing that too easily lends itself to nostalgia and incorporation within the market. One way of avoiding this is to seriously consider the ways historical actors understood themselves and attend to the specific vocabularies and concepts they deployed. After all, the figures I examine in this dissertation used neither "counterculture" nor "subculture" to describe their activity and milieu. These are scholarly concepts forged in institutions that subterraneans actively rejected and denounced.[123] Artists under study here formulated their own category, underground, to make sense of their activity.[124] By foregrounding such vernacular concepts, my analytical framework reveals qualities of individual and collective practices others have missed. Consequently, by attending to the underground's conceptual emergence, a new picture of the 1960s emerges, one that stretches back to the immediate postwar era and foregrounds a milieu largely unstudied by scholars of Cold

[121] See Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1997).
[122] Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 3.
[123] On the history of these concepts, see Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
[124] As Taylor reminds us, ordinary people rarely imagine their worlds in terms recognizable to scholars beholden to various academic disciplines. They do so in forms far removed from the realm of "theory," relying upon "images, stories, and legends." See Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2004, 23.

War America. In that sense, this study seeks to reformulate our memory of that moment in a manner more attuned to those who lived it.

In framing the cultural underground's emergence as an irruption of a distinct imaginary, I hope to prompt questions about the concept's political and cultural relevance today. The underground appeared as a way to describe the very specific political and aesthetic inclination of cultural producers in the aftermath of the Old Left's collapse within Cold War America. As an imaginary and ultimately a counterpublic, it was a distinct entity tied to a clear moment in American history. Imaginaries and publics are historically determined and variable; they exist only as long as the material processes and relationships that constitute them do. The generic deployment of the idea of a cultural underground effaces that specificity. That is not to say, of course, that critics and audiences should not deploy the concept in such ways: this dissertation is not a polemic. It is to say, however, that the underground's continued use warrants explanation: what is the continued relevance of the idea of a cultural underground? How and why does it resonate with cultural producers in the shadow of the key political and cultural contexts that shaped its emergence: the failure of the Old Left, the Cold War, and the privileged discourse of high art? Attention to the historicity of the underground not only answers questions about its emergence, shedding light on the contours of a specific way of imagining politics, but also prompts new questions about forms of political and aesthetic practices in the contemporary era.

Artists, activists, and scholars remain heavily invested in such questions. Many have argued that the idea of an underground is irrelevant in an era in which no sphere of

social life remains untouched by the long tentacles of corporate and finance capitalism.[125] Sukenick suggests that it is no longer relevant, that it is a concept dependent on the ability to imaginatively remove oneself from the mechanizations of the political and economic world, something simply impossible in the present moment. He writes, "There's no place to hide, no dropping out, whatever your situation, it's part of the convoluted incorporations, the "fold-ins," of corporate culture. Paradoxically, we inhabit an inside with no outside."[126] His argument anticipates that of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2000), where they describe the contemporary regime of capitalism and sovereignty as lacking any exterior, incorporating all within its domain, thereby co-opting previous forms of resistance and inaugurating new ones.[127] Much of the critical debate surrounding postmodernism in the 1980s and 1990s hinged on such questions, on whether or not American neoliberalism's hegemonic triumph had effectively nullified resistance as theorists understood it.[128]

The question of the underground's continued relevance as an oppositional political and cultural context is important. If underground thinking was dialectically entwined with Cold War culture, the Cold War's end and America's changing political-economic landscape suggests that the underground may no longer be a viable cultural

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[125] This characterization of capitalism is indebted to journalist Matt Taibbi's characterization of investment banking giant Goldman Sachs as a "great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money." See Matt Taibbi, *Griftopia: A Story of Bankers, Politicians, and the Most Audacious Power Grab in American History.* (New York: Spiegel & Grau Trade Paperbacks, 2011), 209.

[126] Ronald Sukenick, "Avant-PoPoMo Now," *Electronic Book Review*, April 1, 1996, http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/technocapitalism/polylogic; See also Sukenick, *Down and In*.

[127] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[128] See, for instance, E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Postmodernism and Its Discontents: Theories, Practices* (London: Verso, 1988).

category for those seeking a means of resisting dominant culture and the state. Recent years have witnessed a variety of attempts to rethink political organization and collectivity. Scholars and activists have embraced concepts like assemblage and other modes of analysis arguably more attuned to contemporary regimes of capital and social control, a direct response to debates over the nature and form of political possibility in the present moment.[129] I first conceived of this project when men and women set up make-shift encampments in public spaces all across the United States in protest of massive income inequality, rallying behind another problematic and at times contradictory spatial metaphor that many argued signaled the appearance of a new political logic: occupy.[130] While it is beyond the scope of this project to explore radical imaginaries of the present moment, such a project, it seems, could not occur in the absence of this one.

The underground's history – as a concept, as an imaginary, and as a counterpublic – raises issues central to such debates by foregrounding the means by which individuals and collectives envision and enact broad social change. All visions of political and aesthetic possibility are profoundly historical, tied to the moment of their genesis, and

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[129] Consider, for instance, Jasbir Puar's work on assemblage, or Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick Ferguson's exploration of what they call "strange affinities. See Jasbir Puar, "'I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess': Intersectionality, Assemblage, and Affective Politics," *Transversal*, January 2011, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/puar/en; Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson, "Introduction," in *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*, ed. Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[130] A website dedicated to tracking the Occupy Movement identified 1,517 different "occupations" across the world in 2013. See "Occupy Directory," accessed October 24, 2013, http://directory.occupy.net/. On the political logic of the Occupy Movement, see essays by W. J. T. Mitchell, Bernard E. Harcourt, and Michael Taussig, *Occupy: Three Inquiries in Disobedience* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2013); Janet Byrne, ed., *The Occupy Handbook* (Boston: Back Bay Press, 2012). On the significance of the term and concept, see See Angela Davis, "(Un)Occupy," in *Occupy! Scenes from Occupied America* (London: Verso, 2011), 132–33; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation," in *Occupy: Three Inquiries in Disobedience* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2013), 93–130.

perhaps only useful within those contexts. Generally, the history of the underground reveals how historical actors come to envision new models of social change, laying bare the material and ideological relationships that lead them to go and think one way rather than the other. More specifically, it explores a mode of political and aesthetic imagination prevalent throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, one strangely understudied given the frequency with which artists and activists have appropriated it.

LET'S DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

When the Velvet Underground began rocking out in the Hotel Delmonico in 1966 in a room full of "squares" likely eager to diagnose and hospitalize the purposefully grating and deliberately offensive performers, it was a brief collision of worlds whose inhabitants preferred not to mingle. In describing that collision as "a kind of community action-underground-look-at-yourself-film project" the performers invoked a world that had been in the making since the years after World War II, one shaped by the long history of the idea of the underground in American culture.[131] That history was shaped by its longstanding associations with criminality, deviancy, and secrecy, all of which a generation of disaffected artists, intellectuals, and activists found appealing amidst what they saw as the stultifying landscape of postwar America. Of course, the mingling between the underground and the world of the surface would occur more frequently as the decade came to a close, a process that introduced the "underground" into general circulation and ultimately transformed it into a marketing niche.

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[131] Quoted in Glueck, "Syndromes Pop at Delmonico: Andy Warhol and His Gang Meet the Psychiatrist," 36.

The following chapters ground the largely abstract and theoretical discussions of this chapter in the works, habits, and practices of those committed to the possibilities of underground life. They excavate the details of how the underground came to be, who inhabited it, and what they did within it. They dig into the ideological contradictions within the concept and unearth the ways self-described subterraneans navigated the tensions latent within their cultural identity, processes entwined with the shifting ideological terrain of the American cultural life between the end of World War II and the early 1970s. This story's roots lay not in any single location. As demonstrated in the next chapter, the emergence of the "the underground" was shaped by diversely disaffected groups seeking alternatives to the ideologies of American Marxism, each of whom arrived at the possibilities of underground life independently, setting the stage for others to follow suit.

Chapter 2 – Foundations: Three Undergrounds in the Postwar Era

When artists, intellectuals, and activists of the late 1950s and early 1960s proclaimed that they inhabited *the* underground, an imagined space beneath the American nation as it existed in the Cold War imagination, home to communists, queer people, the allegedly mad, and the non-white, they were not the first to appropriate the language and imagery of subterranean America. Intellectually diverse writers of the immediate postwar era – disaffected Marxists, anti-totalitarians, existentialists, and psychoanalysts – appropriated the underground, a criminal space positioned outside the domain of American society, as one in which political and historical agency might be realized by individuals, usually men, who could not or would not conform to the ideologies of prevailing oppositional currents. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the immediate postwar era was a turning point in the conceptual history of the underground, a moment when its iconography began resonating politically in new ways. It was a moment of political reformulation among radicals, a direct consequence of the collapse of the previous era's most powerful leftist organization, the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), and the political paradigm it represented. There was a vacuum in the American radical imagination, one that would be filled, in part, by new strands of underground thinking emerging in the wake of the Second World War's end.

In the early years of the Cold War, the tenuous alignments forged between American communists, liberal organizations, and the state during the peak years of the Popular Front rapidly faded: organizations collapsed and leftists turned away from their

prior commitments out of fear, disillusionment, and at times, necessity.[132] Though some mainstream political figures seemed open to at least considering Communists political equals during World War II, such attitudes changed with the onset of the Cold War.[133] As literary historian Alan Wald puts it, with the onset of the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, communism became a "trigger word" for "disloyalty and deceit."[134] The CPUSA was effectively dismantled: its key leaders were imprisoned under the Smith Act, and the Party itself became actively targeted, infiltrated, and investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.[135] Party members were denied passports, lost federal and military benefits, and if immigrants, faced deportation.[136] After the waves of anti-communist furor throughout the 1950s that threatened the livelihoods of anyone even casually affiliated with American communism, many fled from the

[132] Here, I use the phrase "Popular Front" to describe not just the specific Comintern policy that ordered international Communist Parties to cooperate with non-Communist organizations and institutions in the name of anti-fascism, but also the broad social movement that emerged around the American variant of that policy in the late 1930s and 1940s, that which prioritized social democracy, anti-fascism, anti-lynching, and anti-labor repression. For the definitive treatment of the Popular Front, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998). On the history of the CPUSA during World War II, see Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?: The American Communist Party during the Second World War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982).

[133] For instance, during the war, President Franklin Roosevelt praised the Soviet Union, saying of Joseph Stalin, "I believe that we are going to get along very well with him and the Russian people." Prominent Republican Anti-New Dealer Wendell Wilkie similarly claimed that "we do not need to fear Russia. We need to learn to work with her." Quoted in M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 130.

[134] Wald, *American Night*, xii.

[135] See Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 86–115, 203–308.

[136] Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 4.

institutional left and others hurriedly covered up past political associations with the party.[137]

As the American Left faced the pressures of Cold War anticommunism, communist developments at home and abroad facilitated its fracture. Internal conflicts within the CPUSA facilitated the federal government's attack on the Party. The Party, obsessed with ideological purity, rid itself of dissenters and possible covert FBI agents. As longtime Party leader Dorothy Ray Healey later recounted, "we did as much damage to ourselves, in the name of purifying our ranks as Joe McCarthy and J. Edgar Hoover and all the other witch-hunters combined were able to do."[138] CPUSA leadership, returning to its "ultra-revolutionary" policies of the early 1930s, argued that economic collapse was again imminent, and that fascism in America and violent conflict with the Soviet Union was inevitable. Such policies alienated non-Communist leftists and liberals previously aligned with the CPUSA, breaking up Popular Front alliances and leaving the Party increasingly isolated.[139] Such disillusionments would persist throughout the decade, as many left the CPUSA as the Soviet Union engaged in its own imperialist actions abroad. The Soviet Union's 1956 invasion of Hungary alienated Leftists that still believed the Soviet Union was a progressive nation. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's

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[137] The literature on McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare is expansive. For a comprehensive scholarly account, see Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*. For a comprehensive journalistic account, see Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names*, Third Edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003).

[138] Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers a Life in the American Communist Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 125. Dorothy Healey was a major CPUSA leader in the 1940s and 1950s. She was one of fourteen Californians who were convicted under the Smith Act, though the Supreme Court later overturned her conviction. She was later convicted under the McCarran Act, but the Supreme Court again overturned her conviction. On her life, see Healey and Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers a Life in the American Communist Party*.

[139] Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 215–16.

revelations and denunciation of Joseph Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union earlier that year shattered any remnants of Stalinism amongst the American left, and affirmed the stance of the increasingly influential (and increasingly conservative) anti-Stalinist New York intellectuals.[140]

The institutional left – the left of the Communist Party, the Old Left of the 1930s – was crumbling amidst pressures from multiple angles, a process that had a profound impact upon the cultural landscape of the postwar American left, leaving it in ideological disarray. Its political and aesthetic commitments came under intense scrutiny by the public and the State. Allied and committed writers found themselves without the networks and institutions built throughout the 1930s and early 1940 to support leftist cultural workers, their publications, and their distribution networks.[141] Many simply became disillusioned with them, alienated from the institutional left and other forms of organized leftist activity that did not readily respond to a postwar world haunted by atomic destruction and the specter of totalitarianism. Writers on the left did not disappear, but their postwar literary production looked and felt profoundly different.

This new literary left emphasized different themes, rejecting the rigid proletarianism of the CP in favor of new conceptions of political agency. Wald argues that politically conscious novelists of the postwar era abandoned "the 1930s tradition of forward motion toward a discernable goal of a targeted upheaval against economic

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[140] For more on the impact of Khrushchev's revelations and the Soviet invasion of Hungary on the American Left, see Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 3–34. On the anti-Stalinist left from the 1930s to the 1950s, see Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*.

[141] Examples include the journal *New Masses*, the League of American Writers, and the Harlem Writer's Club. On such institutions, see Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth-Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

injustice; they were becoming permanent insurrectionists against more unfathomable dominions of authority."[142] Writers and intellectuals addressed their alienation from the traditional political and aesthetic commitments characteristic of the literary left in forms more attuned to Theodor Adorno's "negative dialectics" than the socialist realism of the 1930s or the anti-fascist literature of the 1940s.[143] Literary critic Arthur Redding argues similarly, labeling the remnants of the literary left as a "fugitive culture" that "emerged as various 'popular front' writers and activists fled into exile, went underground or grudgingly accommodated themselves to the new order."[144] Such writers eschewed narrative closure, discarded positivistic rationality, and often abandoned the hope or belief that revolutionary social transformation was possible. Alternative political projects and different models of understanding social life animated such projects, including new conceptions of individualism, existentialism, and psychoanalysis.

The embrace of underground life occurred among such alternative conceptions of political agency and social being: it was an imagined space constitutive of the themes described above, emerging alongside and in concert with political and intellectual frameworks that assumed the position Marxism once held in the American radical imagination. This conceptual turn first appeared in the writings of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, specifically in relation to their dissatisfaction with the milieu of American Communism: for both authors, literal underground spaces facilitated the realization of the

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142 Wald, *American Night*, xiv.
143 Ibid., 295.
144 Redding writes broadly of the era's resistant cultural currents, using "underground" in the generic sense. See Arthur Redding, *Turncoats, Traitors, and Fellow Travelers: Culture and Politics of the Early Cold War* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 4.

political agency the CP claimed it wanted to cultivate among African Americans but, from Wright's and Ellison' points of view, refused to actually do. Anti-Stalinist intellectuals and philosophers keyed to the emerging discourse of existentialism imagined a similar underground but in metaphorical terms, one imagined in response to what they saw as the emerging threat of totalitarianism, a newly resonant frame of analysis for de-radicalizing leftists. Publishers like Jay Landesman invoked the underground in a psychoanalytical context, drawing from a discourse increasingly understood as an alternative to class-based theories of individual behavior. These undergrounds were primarily print-based and urban, tied to centers of intellectual and cultural production on the East Coast, emerging in close geographic and ideological proximity to one another.

This chapter explores these influential early postwar undergrounds and pulls them together, establishing a series of relationships oriented around the image and idea of the underground that previous scholars have ignored. It draws upon the work of Wright, Ellison, anti-Stalinist intellectuals like Philip Rahv and William Barrett, as well as publishers like Landesman in order to detail how their conceptions of the underground emerged and responded to the postwar political terrain. I would like to stress the plurality of "underground" here. The figures discussed in this chapter all understood the underground in similar terms, as an imagined criminal space of masculine political and historical agency amidst the shadow of the fragmenting Left, but they did not imagine themselves to inhabit a shared underground. Different pressures and forces shaped their respective undergrounds: they were contextually distinct. After all, people, spaces, and practices can be criminalized in very different ways. Wright's and Ellison's underground

was the result of the criminalization of blackness in the United States, a phenomenon they argue the CP was party to. The existentialist underground was the result of the criminalization of independent and individual dissent by real and imagined totalitarian regimes. The psychoanalytic underground emerged via the criminalization of "neuroses" and "neurotics," psychoanalytic concepts used to police non-normative behaviors, especially with regards to sexuality. These undergrounds resonated with one another, but their architects never explicitly imagined them as having anything in common: they hinged upon specific, and at times very narrowly understood conceptions of criminality. These three undergrounds effectively ran parallel to each other, exerting a formative influence on the writers and artists who would dive underground en masse soon thereafter. Their appearances in the immediate postwar era constitute the pre-history or the foundation of the singular conception of *the* underground in the 1950s and early 1960s discussed in the following chapters.

BLACK SPACE BENEATH

Richard Wright's tumultuous relationship with American Communism is well-documented. After a period of profound commitment to the CPUSA, he severed ties with the organization and with Marxism generally, claiming that it could not and would not work to improve the lot of African Americans as he initially hoped. He ultimately broke with America, becoming a French citizen in 1947 shortly after his public break with the Party, a move that brought with it Wright's increasing interest in existentialism. In the midst of his break, he wrote and published "The Man Who Lived Underground" (1944), a metaphysical and metaphorical exploration of modern American society and a turn away

from the proletarian realism of a novel like *Native Son*, though no less bleak.[145] It recounts the experiences of Fred Daniels, a black man of undisclosed age living in an unidentified American city. He is falsely accused of murder and forced to sign a confession. Fleeing police violence, Daniels escapes into an open manhole, hiding out first in the city's sewer system before settling in a subterranean room he claims as his own. From his underground lair, he breaks into several businesses, witnesses a jewelry store robbery, and then robs the same jewelry store, though he discards what he steals. In the physical spaces beneath the city, he sheds the identities a violently racist American society imposed upon him, allowing him to develop a new perspective on that society, one attuned to the profound contingency of aboveground moral imperatives and ideologies. Daniels returns to the surface, eager to share his knowledge with everyone, but he is rejected and murdered by the police that first arrested him. An indictment of modern America, his story imagines the physical underground as a world lacking in the repressive mechanisms that support American society, especially racism and exploitation. It literalized a prevailing metaphorical conception of the underground to foreground it as a space that cultivates oppositional identities and new senses of individuality.

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[145] An excerpt of the story was published in 1942 in the journal *Accent*, but it would not be published in full until it appeared in Edwin Seaver's anthology, *Cross Section: An Anthology of New American* Writing (1944). For a brief account of the story's publishing history, see Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, 2nd Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 239–42. It was later included in Wright's collection of short stories *Eight Men* (1961). All further citations of "The Man Who Lived Underground" will be drawn from Richard Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground," in *Eight Men* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 19–84.Wright considered the story a major thematic break from his earlier works, a "step beyond" what he described as the "straight black-white stuff." Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, 240.

A despairing tale, it resonates with Wright's later interest in existentialism, leading many to read it as a thematic preface to his post-communist interests.[146] However, scholars have not linked it with his fading commitment to American Communism, despite the fact that he wrote it as he severed ties with the CP and that it was published the same year that break was made public. He chronicled this break in "I Tried to be Communist," a two part essay published in the August and September 1944 issues of *Atlantic Monthly*, the same year "The Man Who Lived Underground" appeared in print.[147] Though critics have not typically considered these texts in relation to one another, they should be understood as companion pieces, the latter a thematic, symbolic, and ideological response to the former. His non-fiction essay provides a crucial starting point for reading his metaphysical exploration of human agency: though very different in style, tone, and form, they both wrestle with the same questions of guilt, individuality, and agency. Closely read together, they offer an early, if not the first, major exploration of the creative possibilities of the underground in the shadow of the left, one that is distinctly attuned to the ways in which the United States criminalizes blackness. "I Tried

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[146] For examples of arguments linking "The Man Who Lived Underground" with European existentialism, see Houston A. Baker, *Blues Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 157–172; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 171; George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 168. Others have argued that his story embodies a distinctly American existentialism rooted not in European philosophy, but in the experience of racism of America, an argument Wright himself made. For examples , see Carla Cappetti, "Black Orpheus: Richard Wright's 'The Man Who Lived Underground,'" *MELUS* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 41–68; Kathryn T. Gines, "'The Man Who Lived Underground': Jean-Paul Sartre and the Philosophical Legacy of Richard Wright"," *Sartre Studies International* 17, no. 2 (2011): 42–59.

[147] Richard Wright, "I Tried to Be a Communist," *Atlantic Monthly* 174 (August 1944): 61–70; Richard Wright, "I Tried to Be a Communist," *Atlantic Monthly* 174 (September 1944): 48–56. "I Tried to Be a Communist" also appeared in key anticommunist anthology *The God That Failed* (1949), leading some to situate his break within the context of the Cold War. See Arthur Koestler, in *The God That Failed*, ed. Richard Crossman (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 15–75.

to Be a Communist" argues that the CP prohibited individuality and self-realization, traits he hoped it could cultivate en masse, a consequence of its refusal to interrogate its own racist underpinnings. "The Man Who Lived Underground" responds to this failure by suggesting that life underground, the very space the criminalization of blackness drove men to, can facilitate such things. Reading these texts in relation to each other newly situates Wright in the history of the 1960s underground.

One part tribute, one part critique, and one part lament, "I Tried to Be a Communist" details Wright's CPUSA experience from beginning to end, tracing a narrative from utopian hope to disillusionment. He joined in 1932, attracted initially by its stated interest in liberating oppressed peoples across the globe. He believed it offered African Americans a concrete role in international proletarian revolution.[148] Wright states,

> It was not the economics of Communism, nor the great power of trade unions, nor the excitement of underground politics that claimed me; my attention was caught by the similarity of the experiences of workers in other lands, by the possibility of uniting scattered but kindred peoples into a whole. It seemed to me that here at last, in the realm of revolutionary expression, Negro experience could find a home, a functioning value and role.[149]

He conveys an almost utopian hope in the possibilities of global solidarity the CP proposed. It offered a radical conception of collective agency, one that did not efface the

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[148] This was a common attitude amongst African American writers at the time. The CPUSA's commitment to international solidarity attracted many writers of color to the milieu of American Communism throughout the 1930s and 1940s. For an exploration of these issues, see William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922–1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Bill V. Mullen and James Smethurst, eds., *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[149] Wright, "I Tried to Be a Communist," August 1944, 62.

experiences of marginalized and exploited peoples. It "did not say: 'Be like us and we will like you, maybe.' It said: 'If you possess enough courage to speak out what you are, you will find that you are not alone. It urged life to believe in life'."[150] For Wright, the Party was neither patronizing nor didactic. It was an organization that facilitated the self-actualization of marginalized people. The CP spoke to a distinct "you," not a homogenous "we," to help the "disinherited" find community and social sustenance. Wright envisioned an inclusive party, one that African Americans or other oppressed peoples did not need to change in order to join. Rather, their participation might change the Party, helping produce a new sense of multiracial collectivity within the communist milieu.

That is not to say Wright was naïve about the CP. He believed the Party had serious limits, but felt he could help it overcome them. He continues,

> The Communists, I felt, had oversimplified the experience of those whom they sought to lead. In their efforts to recruit masses, they had missed the meaning of the lives of the masses, had conceived of people in too abstract a manner. I would try to put some of that meaning back. I would tell Communists how common people felt, and I would tell common people of the self-sacrifice of Communists who strove for unity among them.[151]

For Wright, the Party offered an ideal worth aspiring to, but it lacked an understanding of the concrete realities marginalized communities faced. Wright thought that he could communicate such realities, effectively bridging the gap between working class communities of color and the lofty aspirations of the CP.

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[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid., 63.

The second half of the essay directly responds to these moments of CP utopianism, detailing the problems he later suggested the space of the underground could solve. Here, Wright argues that the Party really did say "Be like us and we will like you, maybe," that it was out-of-touch and intolerant of dissent.[152] While Wright hoped to continue writing and organizing other black artists, the Party ordered him to "organize a committee against the high cost of living" and later to go as a "youth delegate" to Switzerland.[153] When he refused and decided to break with the Party, it brought public censure, revealing the Party's inability to conceive of its African American members as anything other than ideological abstractions, avatars of Party policy. He writes, "I saw now that my comrades were acting out a fantasy that had no relation whatever to the reality of their environment."[154] They had not overcome Wright's initial reservations about the CP's commitment to those they purported to lead. They continued to miss "the meaning of the lives of the masses" and would not permit Wright to communicate them.[155]

Wright fleshes out his take on the CP's refusal to recognize the individual experiences of its members via his account of Ross, an African American comrade threatened with expulsion by the CPUSA, accused of spying, endorsing "Negro nationalism," and other "political crimes."[156] Wright reluctantly attended his Party trial, urged by Party members so that he might learn what happens to "enemies of the working

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[152] Ibid., 62.
[153] Wright, "I Tried to Be a Communist," September 1944, 49, 50.
[154] Ibid., 51.
[155] Wright, "I Tried to Be a Communist," August 1944, 63.
[156] Wright, "I Tried to Be a Communist," September 1944, 49.

class."[157] The trial itself was a farce: according to Wright, Ross pled guilty to all charges. Wright attributes this not to the Party per se, but to the Party's claim to "a vision of a communal world," one that "bound us all together," and that Ross could not betray.[158] His explanation of Ross's actions is worth quoting at length:

> Ross had not been doped: he had been awakened. It was not a fear of the Communist Party that had made him confess, but a fear of the punishment that he would exact of himself that made him tell of his wrongdoings. The Communists had talked to him until they had given him new eyes with which to see his own crime. And then they sat back and listened to him to tell how he had erred. He was one with all the members there, regardless of race or color; his heart was theirs and their hearts were his; and when a man reaches that state of kinship with others, that degree of oneness, or when a trial has made him kin after he has been sundered from them by wrongdoing, then he must rise and say, out of a sense of the deepest morality in the world: 'I'm guilty. Forgive me.'[159]

Wright describes a man who had become "like them," not because of their strength, but because of the strength of his commitment to their vision: Ross's commitment to the radical vision Communism offered permitted the Party to transform him: "His personality, his sense of himself, had been obliterated."[160] Thus, Ross became the Party's wishes embodied: they replaced his eyes, deracinated him, and took joint custody of his heart, as if he physically became someone else.

Wright's account of Ross's transformation is certainly a critique of what he perceives as Communism's intolerance for individuality. However, this commitment to the individual is not an early version of liberal individualism, but a critique of the CP's

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[157] Ibid., 53.
[158] Ibid., 54.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.

commitment to the same racist principles that structure American society.[161] Nowhere in the essay does Wright critique the vision of international solidarity that initially attracted him to communism. He is critical of the Party as an organization, not necessarily its vision. His conception of individuality was consonant with the radical vision he initially attributed to the Party, a vision the organization effectively distorted into a homogenous collective. It erased rather than nurtured individual identities, undermining the revolutionary agency of marginalized people of color. In that that sense, pre-trial Ross, Wright, and others not fully incorporated into the Party were eternally guilty in its eyes. In this sense, American communism was no different than the dominant culture of the United States. Hence Wright's description of his former comrades during Ross's trial: "American life had so corrupted their consciousness that they were unable to recognize their friends when they saw them."[162]

While this portion of "I Tried to Be a Communist" demonstrates that the CP could not facilitate revolutionary agency, "The Man Who Lived Underground" proposes that life underground could. Wright's short story suggests that within the discarded spaces of modern America could those individuals discarded by America realize themselves creatively and politically. It begins with the theme "I Tried to Be a Communist" ends on: the impact of guilt; or rather, the impact of the presumption of guilt due to the structures of white supremacy. American racism forced Daniels to duck into an open manhole in the story's opening, effectively banishing him from the world above. As he states "he was

[161] As literary historian William Maxwell has argued, Wright remained interested in Marxism even as he was breaking with the Party, invested in Joseph Stalin's writings on ethnic minorities. See Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left*, 162–64.
[162] Wright, "I Tried to Be a Communist," September 1944, 54.

tired of running and dodging….they're looking for me all over."[163] Daniels's predicament is representative of the predicament faced by African Americans across the United States.[164] He was presumed guilty, permitted no individual identity except that which the state dictates. The murder the police falsely accused him of was just a convenient justification for his arrest. From the beginning, then, this is a story about criminality as the state defines it.

Wright's vision of the underground corresponds to traditional representations of the subterranean infrastructures characteristic of modern urban spaces. It is dark, dank, and home to death: it is the world aboveground inverted.[165] In his first moments in the city's underground sewer system, he encounters a dead baby floating in the city's waste. Repulsed as he is by such an environment, he cannot leave: "He had to leave this foul place, but leaving meant facing those policemen who had wrongly accused him. No, he could not go back aboveground."[166] However, the initially threatening world beneath the surface gives way to "a new kind of living," one with its own temporal rhythms marked only by the brief flare up of light provided by the matches he periodically uses to navigate the city's lower depths.[167] These passages grant Daniels access to the entire city. He freely enters various businesses – a movie theater, a grocery store, a funeral home, and a jewelry store – through unsecured basement doors accessible via the city's network

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[163] Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground," 19.
[164] On the criminalization of African Americans by the American state, see Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*; Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).
[165] On cultural representations of sewers and similar subterranean spaces, see Pike, *Subterranean Cities*.
[166] Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground," 27.
[167] Ibid., 25.

of underground passages. His underground mobility contrasts directly with his lack of mobility aboveground. As the narrator writes, "He had triumphed over the world aboveground. He was free!"[168] Though his flight underground was made under duress, the dark world beneath the surface of the city offers a reprieve from the American racism, if only because he is the only living person down there. It is space devoid of the ideologies prevailing aboveground.

The absence of the ideologies that structure his identity aboveground grants him the opportunity to reconstitute it on his own terms. Underground, Daniels's identity seems to evaporate in disorienting but nevertheless liberatory ways. Beneath the streets, he is unable to remember his name. While robbing the jewelry store, he pauses at a typewriter and types his name as "freddaniels." He takes the typewriter as well, and returns underground and again begins to type his name, but cannot, having forgotten it entirely, truly becoming "the man who lived underground." After a moment of "vague terror" upon realizing he cannot remember who he is, he laughs, asking himself why he ought to worry at all. Forgetting his name frees him to adopt any number of identities, imagining himself a corporate executive and rich man. He continues typing, writing "It was a long hot day."[169] This was the first sentence of the story in its original form, a reflexive turn in the story suggesting that the underground is allowing Daniels to write his own story, to craft his self on his own terms.[170]

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[168] Ibid., 54.
[169] Ibid., 53.
[170] Michel Fabre, *The World of Richard Wright* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 106.

In other words, the underground cultivates individual and oppositional creativity in ways the CP could not, as seen in the fact that underground Daniels becomes an artist.[171] After robbing the store of cash, diamonds, and gold jewelry, he returns underground not to examine his loot, but to muse on its irrelevance to him: he was "intrigued with the form and color of the money, with the manifold reactions which he knew that men aboveground held toward it."[172] Underground, they are useful only as aesthetic objects. Daniels uses them to decorate his new home: he pastes one hundred dollar bills on the wall and hangs golden watches as if they were pictures. The money and diamonds are interesting only as evidence of the "various currents of life swirling aboveground."[173] He repurposes the means of capitalist exchange as raw material for his creative endeavors, critiquing the surface world in the process: he declares his underground home a "mocking symbol" standing "between him and the world that had branded him guilty."[174] He abandons the idea of property altogether, viewing the money and jewelry as part of a commons accessible to everyone: "He had not stolen the money; he had simply picked it up, just as a man would pick up firewood in a forest."[175]

Having shed the ideologies of the surface, escaping American racism and rejecting American capitalism, Daniels looks at its values in new ways. His artistic treatment of the money and jewelry rests upon his recognition that their value is socially

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[171] For a general discussion of Wright's exploration of creativity in "The Man Who Lived Underground" that does not consider his communist connections, see Cappetti, "Black Orpheus: Richard Wright's 'The Man Who Lived Underground,'" 49–50.
[172] Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground," 47.
[173] Ibid., 54.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

constructed. He extends this analysis to the entire moral realm: "Maybe *any*thing's right, he mumbled. Yes, if the world as men had made it was right, then anything else was right, any act a man took to satisfy himself, murder, theft, torture."[176] This thought initially horrifies him, leading some to read this passage as a dive into nihilistic solipsism, with his fear being a manifestation of a universal existential dread.[177] This reading is only sustainable if one ignores the racially specific ideologies and actions that first drove Daniels underground. His fear is not universal, but historical, tied to the recognition that categories like "guilty" or "innocent" are constructions entwined with ideologies of white supremacist capitalism. Before, when contemplating his presumed guilt, he tells himself, "They know I didn't do anything," and wonders "how he could prove it."[178] Now, recognizing that "*any*thing" is right, he realizes proving his innocence is impossible: as he puts it, his guilt was "a faint pattern designed long before."[179] His fear emerges out of his recognition that he would always be guilty in the eyes of the police and the state they represent.[180] This is not a defeatist attitude, but the precondition to imagining political action against such a situation, as it is the recognition that the world is changeable. It is evidence of a developing political consciousness: he now sees the social structures that

[176] Emphasis in source, Ibid., 56.
[177] See, for instance, Fabre, *The World of Richard Wright*, 105.
[178] Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground," 41.
[179] Ibid., 60.
[180] On Wright's consideration of the police as quintessential representations of the American state, see Jeffrey Clapp, "Richard Wright and the Police," *Post45*, September 12, 2011, http://post45.research.yale.edu/2011/09/richard-wright-and-the-police/.

constitute modern America and his place within them.[181] To avoid his initial fear, he turns on his stolen radio and hears reports from the war front, but such reports foster an "irrational compulsion to act."[182] This urge to act is the first expression of his nascent political consciousness, a refusal of the path of modern society that brands men like him guilty and engages in world war, and the glimmerings of desire to change it, as this is the moment when Daniels decides to return to the surface.

A brief comparison between Wright's characterization of the non-fictional Ross and fictional Daniels is instructive here, as Daniels's recognition of the processes constitutive of his criminalization echo Wright's writings on the nature of "guilt" within the CP. Both figures were always-already guilty by virtue of being themselves within the context of institutions intolerant, sometimes violently so, of dissent or any trace of deviation. However, they take very different paths en route to recognizing their "guilt." The Party replaces Ross's sense of self, leading him to acquiesce to the Party's logic, that which rendered him guilty. Daniels's experience underground purges him of ideological assumptions, enabling him to understand the logic by which American society branded him guilty. Ross was given new eyes, but Daniels appears to use his own in new ways.[183] While the CP supplied Ross's political vision, Daniel's political consciousness was organic, emerging out of his own experiences in an alternative sphere of life.

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[181] Daniels's newfound political perspective might be considered a version of Duboisian double consciousness, what Wright would describe in his later works as "double vision." On Wright's version of "double consciousness" see Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 161.

[182] Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground," 57.

[183] Daniels's interactions with the physical spaces of the underground lend themselves to a phenomenological reading. On this, see Joseph A. Young, "Phenomenology and Textual Power in Richard Wright's 'The Man Who Lived Underground,'" *MELUS* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 69–93.

The degree to which Daniels's experience directly contrasts with Ross's foregrounds Wright's argument that the underground life can facilitate those traits and practices that the CP could not. Daniels's emerging political consciousness ought to be read as the first appearances of the types of radical individuality Wright argued the CP was incapable of generating. Nowhere previously in the story does Daniels express any political understanding of the events that drove him underground. In fact, nowhere previously in the story does Daniels express any interest in sociality whatsoever, the very precondition of political thought and action. He interacts with few people during his underground sojourn, spending most of his time watching, listening, and condemning those living aboveground. His creativity, his mocking attitude toward capitalism, and his horror at the state of the world emerge only after he embraces his underground life, a life that has facilitated his personal process of ideological demystification. Once this has occurred, he suddenly becomes interested in sharing his revelations: "He shuddered, feeling that, in spite of his fear, sooner or later he would go up into that dead sunshine and somehow say something to somebody about all this."[184] The impulse towards collectivity is implicit in such a statement, suggesting that the establishing of some sort of collectivity would be his next step. The underground, it would seem, had the potential to accomplish what the Communists could not.

That is not to say that Wright was hopeful about such collectivity forming, at least not on the surface of America. Daniels fails to communicate his new perspective to those living on the surface, meeting rejection and ultimately death when he tries to spread his

[184] Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground," 58.

newfound knowledge. However, Wright does not attribute Daniel's failure to the limits of the political consciousness the underground facilitated. He failed because those on the surface recognized its political potential, and violently repressed it.[185] Lawson, Daniels's murderer, recognizes the threat someone like Daniels poses to the established order: while the other police officers laugh at the man claiming to come from the sewers, he listens attentively; when the others label him mad, Lawson counters, "Maybe it's because he lives in a white man's world."[186] When Lawson murders him, he says, "You've got to shoot this kind. They'd wreck things," acknowledging the threat Daniels posed to the established order the police represent.[187] He could have spread his knowledge, as the story singles out other individuals facing circumstances similar to Daniels: those accused of committing the crimes Daniels himself committed, a boy and the jewelry store watchman. As he puts it, "although [the watchman] was not guilty of the crime of which he had been accused, he was guilty, had always been guilty."[188] Daniels, however, does not interact with these figures: he leaves the boy and watches the jewelry store watchman commit suicide after suffering a beating by the same police that beat Daniels. These figures are not racially identified, though the lack of comment on such a fact by other characters implies they are white, suggesting that Daniels's newfound knowledge might be spread, though it seems unlikely unless they too flee underground or meet a subterranean like Daniels.

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[185] As literary theorist Houston A. Baker puts it, "he cannot effect dialogue, communitas, or change because the social world fears and rejects and authentic consciousness that he represents." See Baker, *Blues Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, 171.
[186] Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground," 81.
[187] Ibid., 84.
[188] Ibid., 62.

That is not to say this underground is wholly liberatory or completely generalizable. Wright's vision of the underground facilitates an exclusively masculine realm of agency, a political limitation present throughout much of Wright's literary output.[189] The gendered outlines of this underground are most evident in the general absence of women in both "I Tried to Be a Communist" and "The Man Who Lived Underground." When women do appear in the short story, they serve only to demonstrate Daniels's distance from the world aboveground and highlight his newfound underground powers. For instance, while secretly moving about the city, Wright encounters two white women who see him: the first, an older woman who mistakes him for a clerk in a grocery store; the second, a secretary who sees him in the jewelry store he later robs. He assumes the role of grocery store clerk, sells the woman some grapes, and she leaves without incident, demonstrating his ability to assume whatever identity he pleases. When the secretary sees him, he flees. She tries to tell others about him, but they do not believe her, demonstrating his new powers of mobility. Black women appear indirectly. When Daniels recalls his aboveground life, he groups his wife with the police and the woman they accused him of murdering. The narrator describes his relationship to them in terms of ownership: "He possessed them now more completely than he had every possessed them when he had lived aboveground."[190] It is as if the underground strengthened his claims to patriarchal authority.

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[189] Wright's misogyny is well-documented. For a recent account and reconsideration of his work's gender politics, see Cheryl Higashida, "Aunt Sue's Children: Re-Vewing the Gender(ed) Politics of Richard Wright's Radicalism," *American Literature* 75, no. 2 (June 2003): 395–425.
[190] Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground," 40.

Daniels failed, but Wright succeeded in communicating the potential value of the underground as an imaginative realm and of the possibilities of underground living. When considered in relation to "I Tried to Be a Communist," Wright appears as the first to invoke such a space as an alternative to Old Leftist political paradigms and institutions. In conceptualizing the underground as a space in which a creative agency, albeit one limited by its patriarchal assumptions, might be realized and mobilized in opposition to dominant society, he offered up a distinct conception of political agency, one entwined with the possibilities of criminal life and spaces. Wright's underground is a space "outside" the mainstream world, free of its ideologies and free of its history, and while it is a place individuals do not enter willingly, it can be appropriated by men in potentially liberatory ways. When "The Man Who Lived Underground" is situated in relation to his break with the CP, the underground appears as a "third way," a political possibility beneath the institutions of capitalism and communism.[191]

Wright's exploration of the underground was not anomalous amongst disillusioned black communists. Ralph Ellison's celebrated novel *Invisible Man* (1952) explores a similarly imagined underground, a conceptual move Ellison made in the wake of his own break from American communism. Though they would express profoundly different political views throughout the 1950s, Wright and Ellison shared a similar

[191] In that sense, it prefaces his work in *The Outsider* (1953), a text written after his complete break with Marxism that picks up many of this short story's themes but more explicitly denounces communism and fascism. As Gilroy puts it, "As elsewhere in Wright's work, *The Outsider* defines modernity as a period and a region characterized by the collapse of old myths. This insight provides the context for Wright's discussion of both fascism and communism, equivalents in that both are 'political expressions of the twentieth century's atheistic way of life'." See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 165.

political trajectory in the previous decade.[192] Ellison was active in Communist Party circles throughout the 1940s. Though he was never an official member of the CP, he served as a member of the League of American Writers and wrote for Communist-affiliated publications like *New Masses* and *Negro Quarterly*, the latter of which he coedited.[193] Like Wright, he saw Communism as a movement genuinely interested in black liberation, but ultimately turned away from it, as he came to believe the CP had abandoned its commitment to African American revolutionary struggle and the plight of the working class.[194] It was in this context that he imagined an underground akin to Wright's: in *Invisible Man* he imagines a space removed from history and ideology wherein individual agency might be realized. The unnamed protagonist of Ellison's novel utilizes an underground space to reflect upon the various processes that drove him there, cultivating a critical perspective always just beyond his grasp aboveground. That is to say that the underground cultivates what the various institutions the narrator moves through, including a lightly veiled treatment of American Communism, cannot.

The latter half of *Invisible Man*, which focuses on a thinly veiled depiction of the CPUSA called the Brotherhood, presents a narrative akin to Wright's "I Tried to Be a Communist." It is in many ways Ellison's definitive statement on the appeals, limits, and

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[192] For a scholarly account of Ellison's and Wright's politics, see Kenneth W. Warren, *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 25–41; Lawrence P. Jackson, "Ralph Ellison's Politics of Integration," in *A Historical Guide to Ralph Ellison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 171–205.

[193] Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time*, 287. On Ellison's relationship to African American Radicalism in the 1940s, see Christopher Z. Hobson, "Invisible Man and African American Radicalism in World War II," *African American Review* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 355–76. For a comprehensive account of Ellison's relationship to and activity within the CPUSA, see Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

[194] Foley, *Wrestling with the Left*, 22–23; Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time*, 286–88.

failures of the Communist movement.[195] This portion of the book serves as a foil to the possibilities of the underground, and sets the narrator on his subterranean path. The Brotherhood is initially a fulfilling organization: the narrator claims it made him "become more human," echoing Wright's claims that membership within the CP cultivated a radical sense of collective humanity.[196] The Brotherhood gives the narrator clarity of purpose, a realized identity, and even a new name, but it quickly becomes clear that it is only interested in the African American community insofar as it can help further Brotherhood goals. Like Wright, Ellison's critique of American communism hinged on the CP's failure to treat African American members and issues as anything but abstractions deployed in the service of Party policy, a racial paternalism expressed most clearly in the novel by the actions of Brother Jack.[197] Such an organization has no tolerance for individual action or individuality, as evidenced in its denunciation of the narrator's decision to hold a funeral for Brotherhood apostate Clifton. Brother Jack, who lost an eye during a Brotherhood-organized protest, holds his glass eye up as evidence of his willingness to sacrifice himself for the good of the Brotherhood, immediately recalling Wright's description of Ross's CP-supplied "new eyes" in "I Tried to Be a Communist." The Brotherhood is the last of many institutions the narrator encounters that cannot facilitate any sense of self understanding. The narrator realizes this, explicitly drawing the parallel for his imagined audience between "the arrogant absurdity of Norton

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[195] See Foley, *Wrestling with the Left*; Jesse Wolfe, "'Ambivalent Man': Ellison's Rejection of Communism," *African American Review* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 621–37.
[196] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 346.
[197] For a comparative account of Wright's and Ellison's break with communism, see Wolfe, "'Ambivalent Man': Ellison's Rejection of Communism," 630–37.

and Emerson" and the Brotherhood, all of which saw him as "a natural resource to be used."[198] Again, as Wright concluded, Ellison suggests the overarching white supremacist logic of American society underwrote the actions and ideas of the Party, prohibiting it from functioning as an organization that facilitated individual thought and genuine collective action.

As in "The Man Who Lived Underground," such racist attitudes ultimately drive the narrator into the physical spaces of the underground: first the sewer system, and ultimately the basement where he narrates the work's prologue and epilogue. Once there, he finds what the Party could not provide: an understanding of himself, a personal narrative voice, and capability for potentially collective action.[199] As literary critic Robert B. Stepto has argued, the narrator expresses the self-awareness that has eluded him his whole life in the novel's prologue and epilogue. This self-awareness emerges out of his specific spatial location: he tells his story from the forgotten basement of a whites-only apartment building. It is there that he realizes that he had spent years "trying to adopt the opinions of others," a fact apparent to readers through his narration of his life. "Going underground," as he puts it, enabled this narration: again, the underground facilitated a creative endeavor.[200] Forced underground, he can reflect upon his experiences and narrate them, giving "pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your certainties," a process that produces a critical political perspective.[201] The narrator describes this

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[198] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 508.
[199] Robert B. Stepto, "Literacy and Hibernation: Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man," in *Ralph Ellison* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 52.
[200] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 580.
[201] Ibid.

process as a period of "hibernation…a covert preparation for a more overt action."[202] The object of this action, the epilogue reveals, is the reaffirmation and realization of American principles, "the principle upon which the country was built," what he describes as the adoption of a "socially responsible role" that requires his return aboveground.[203]

Ellison's politics were vastly different than Wright's in the early to mid-1950s. His endorsement of Americanism is a profoundly conservative resolution to a novel with radical impulses. Nevertheless, Ellison's underground closely mirrors Wright's. As literary critic Barbara Foley reveals in her account of the novel's creation, early drafts featured a far more sympathetic vision of Marxism and Marxists, containing plotlines bespeaking a commitment to Marxist proletarian realism and positive representations of Brotherhood members.[204] According to Foley, Ellison added the novel's famous prologue and epilogue late in the novel's writing, when he was actively steering the novel away from its Marxist orientation and sympathies.[205] This suggests that, despite Ellison's vastly different politics, like Wright, he too turned to the underground as he was breaking from the left, finding within it the means to creatively constitute new individual identities.[206] In that sense his underground serves the same function as Wright's: it is a space outside the

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[202] Ibid., 13.
[203] Ibid., 574, 581.
[204] See Foley, *Wrestling with the Left*, especially chapters four through eight.
[205] Ibid., 424 n.6.
[206] Other similarities abound. Like Wright, Ellison's underground is home to a distinct sense of temporality, one experienced by the narrator under the influence of marijuana, what Alexander Weheliye describes as the "groove of history," a historical logic directly counter to the Hegelian logic embraced by the Brotherhood. See Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 19–45. Furthermore, both the narrator and Fred Daniels embrace creativity underground: the narrator's "tinkering" with lights and audio equipment is an aesthetic act.

logics of a dominant American society, offering its inhabitants a critical perspective on that society and stirring them to social action.[207]

This is reinforced by the possibilities the novel attributes to invisibility. Ellison establishes a close relationship between invisibility and being underground: they are tightly bound within the novel, suggesting that Invisible Man might very well be described as Underground Man. This connection was latent within Wright's Story – Daniels's high degree of mobility might be considered a kind of metaphorical invisibility – but Ellison brings it to the surface. According to Ellison, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* directly influenced his conceptualization of his narrator.[208] Ellison explicitly stated that invisibility had subterranean origins, writing that "the voice of invisibility issued from deep within our complex American underground."[209] Ellison's use of "underground" here refers to conventional understandings of it as the space of repressed and deviant practices upon which the stability of the aboveground depends, in this case a racialized repository of criminality. Thus is the logic of white supremacy that

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[207] Multiple scholars have explored the similarity between these Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground" and Ellison's *Invisible Man*, though with minimal attention to each author's prior CP commitments or any consideration of their relationship to other underground arts. Thomas Heise argues that both writers subvert conventional notions of the underworld as repositories of criminal behavior. See Thomas Heise, *Urban Underworlds: A Geography of Twentieth-Century American Literature and Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 127–168. George Cotkin argues that both texts exemplify American of existentialism. See Cotkin, *Existential America*, 161–83. James Braxton Peterson also explores their shared use of trope of the underground in "Concepts of the Underground in Black Culture" (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 114–138. Peterson's argument approaches my own, as he similarly claims that the underground functions as a space of "expressive wholeness." However, he does not situate the crises of political and aesthetic agency depicted and resolved in these works in relation to each author's initial hopes that the CP could provide such "wholeness." I argue that their joint turn to the underground must be understood in relation to their communist pasts.

[208] Ralph Ellison, "Introduction," in *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), xix. For an account of the relationship between Wright, Ellison, and Dostoevsky, see Michael F. Lynch, *Creative Revolt: A Study of Wright, Ellison, and Dostoevsky* (New York: Peter Lang International, 1990).

[209] Ellison, "Introduction," xviii.

excludes blackness from its field of vision. Ellison's underground is akin to that of Wright's. It is produced and shaped via dominant American culture's criminalization of blackness. It is not a coincidence that the narrator's underground life begins much like Fred Daniels's: he falls into an open manhole after facing harassment by two police officers hurling racial epithets. That is not to say Ellison's unnamed protagonist is simply Daniels in new form, but it is to say that the same forces drove each character underground.[210]

The figure of Rinehart, the mysterious criminal hipster, embodies these entwined notions of invisibility, criminality, and being underground, suggesting that the spatiality that facilitates the narrator's self-awareness might be personified and carried aboveground, something Wright was pessimistic about. If the narrator is the Invisible Man, Rinehart is the novel's Underground Man. The narrator first encounters the notion of invisibility after he briefly adopts the identity of Rinehart, a figure seemingly known to all but the narrator. Rinehart is a pimp, a hustler, number runner, and a reverend advertising his services as a "spiritual technologist."[211] His church promises its attendees a sight of the "seen unseen….the invisible," as if it were a congregation of invisible men and women, individuals with the degree of self-understanding the narrator would come to possess underground.[212] Rinehart occupies a very different world than the narrator, one where he can adopt any number of identities and exploit them. As the narrator recounts,

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[210] Reportedly, Fred Daniel's underground odyssey directly inspired Ellison's narrator's underground escape from police, Ras the Destroyer, and the riot consuming Harlem. See Foley, *Wrestling with the Left*, 215.
[211] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 495.
[212] Ibid., 496.

"His world was possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool. I must have been crazy and blind. The world in which we lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity and Rine the rascal was at home."[213] Rinehart is able to recreate himself as each situation warrants. This grants a degree of agency and self-understanding to the figure of the criminal that the narrator is only able to apprehend once he fully immerses himself in the underground. His self-description in the epilogue echoes his initial understanding of Rinehart: "I assign myself no rank or any limit, and such an attitude is very much against the trend of the times. But my world has become one of infinite possibilities. What a phrase – still it's a good phrase and a good view of life, and a man shouldn't accept any other; that much I've learned underground."[214] Public knowledge of Rinehart is fragmentary – his church attendees seem to have no knowledge of his illegal gambling operation, for instance – suggesting he too occupies "no rank or any limit." He lives an underground life aboveground, the same that the narrator will once he ends his hibernation.

Both Ellison and Wright map a conceptual terrain of freedom and historical agency within the spaces dominant American society criminalized. The self-conscious criminal, here a thoroughly racialized subject position, wields a degree of power over social life, a consequence of understanding the structures and processes that constitute it: they are in possession of special "underground" knowledge. This could be considered a form of "double consciousness," as it is certainly a look through a Duboisian veil.

[213] Ibid., 498.
[214] Ibid., 576.

However, this situates that look from a very specific position in the spatial imaginary of the modern United States: it is a look through the veil from an explicitly defined space below. Of course, there is a long tradition of radical African American writers utilizing the trope of the underground going back to the nineteenth century, especially in relation to the Underground Railroad.[215] However, Ellison and Wright invoke it in a very specific context: African American radical dissolution with the American institutional Left. In this context, the figure of the criminal appears to replace that of the worker, a broad expansion of historical agency (in the Marxist sense) given the generalized criminalization of blackness in the United States. This particular postwar political strategy was part of a broad literary refusal of the aesthetic and political ideologies of the 1930s, one shaped by the limits of American Communism but also the increasing pressures of the Cold War. Their turn to the underground spaces of American cities, a highly metaphorical embrace of criminal spaces, is representative of a literary and political tendency running through the dismantled pieces of American Communism, pieces that would come together in new forms in the following decade. They figure the rhetorical and political trajectories of other groups imagining dissent in the fragmented Left's shadow, the emerging community of anti-totalitarian existentialists and idiosyncratic psychoanalysts addressed in the next two sections.

A Freedom Beneath Totalitarianism

The specter and legacy of philosophical existentialism looms large over the previous section: I have made reference to Wright's existentialist connections, as well as

[215] See Peterson, "Concepts of the Underground in Black Culture."

Ellison's interest in the writings of Dostoevsky. Their interest in existentialism was typical of many American writers, intellectuals, and students in the postwar era. Existentialism in the 1940s and 1950s was less of an established philosophical tradition – it had yet to be canonized within the American academy – and more of a loosely connected but fractious intellectual community. It included the aforementioned Dostoevsky and the rising intellectual celebrity Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as the intellectual communities invested in the philosophical problems they addressed, such as the nature of being and human freedom, and the responsibility and possibility of individual actions.[216] For many, it provided a language with which to critique totalitarian structures of power – capitalist or communist – in the postwar era. It was an oppositional philosophy, replete with theories of individual psychology, individual action, and sociality, unwed to the ideological polarities of the Cold War. Sartre, for instance, famously advocated a Marxist "third way" between American capitalism and Soviet-style Communism, a position that drew the ire of American liberals, conservatives, and communists alike.[217] Existentialism appealed to those, like Wright and Ellison, breaking with American Communism and seeking out new political philosophies.

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[216] As early anthologist of existentialism Walter Kaufmann famously put it in 1958, the "so-called existentialists share a preoccupation with dread, death, despair, and dauntlessness as well as the conviction that English-speaking philosophy does not deserve the name of philosophy, and…a heartfelt aversion for each other." See Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 1978), 26.

[217] On Sartre's reception in America, see Ann Fulton, *Apostles of Sartre: Existentialism in America, 1945-1963* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 83–110. Lloyd L. Brown, for instance, described Sartre's *Nausea* as the "literature of the graveyard" in the Marxist magazine *Masses and Mainstream* in 1951. See Lloyd L. Brown, "Which Way for the Negro Writer," *Masses and Mainstream* 4, no. 3 (March 1951): 63. Such disdain would fade as the decade progressed. The same journal later featured three essays by Sartre, though all focused on explicitly political rather than philosophical issues. See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Weapon Against History," *Masses and Mainstream* 7, no. 8 (April 1954): 17–19; Jean-Paul

The trope of the underground appeared frequently in this emerging American discourse about existentialism, though in a very different sense than how it appeared in the writings of Wright and Ellison. Anti-Stalinist "New York Intellectuals" like Philip Rahv and William Barrett heaped praise upon and wrote extensively about Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864) and celebrated his vision of the "Underground Man."[218] Among students and intellectuals, existentialism became known as a philosophy of the underground, a consequence of Sartre's reputation as a member of the French Resistance of World War II. In these cases, the underground continued to describe a criminalized sphere of activity, one completely alienated from the world aboveground wherein individual masculine agency might be realized.[219] However, this underground was criminalized by different factors. Wright and Ellison's explorations of race and existentialism were the exception rather than the rule. Most writers concerned with existentialism during this era understood their turn towards the underground in relation to the specter of totalitarianism abroad, a concept emerging at that time among anti-Stalinists that served as an alternative to Marxism's class-based analyses of social and

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Sartre, "Cold War and Anti-Communism," *Masses and Mainstream* 8, no. 8 (August 1955): 26–30; Jean-Paul Sartre, "The China I Saw," *Masses and Mainstream* 9, no. 3 (April 1956): 15–20.

[218] I will use the term "New York Intellectuals" to describe the diffuse, predominantly Jewish, leftist intellectual community of New York City associated with publications like *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*¸ and *Dissent*. See Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and Its Circle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*; Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Joseph Dorman, ed., *Arguing the World: The New York Intellectuals in Their Own Words* (New York: Free Press, 2000).

[219] This masculinized appropriation of Dostoevsky thereby stood in opposition to the feminist strands of the Russian Revolutionary tradition that Dostoevsky had an ambivalent relationship with. See Michael R. Katz and William G. Wagner, "Introduction: Chernyshevsky, What Is to Be Done? And the Russian Intelligentsia," in *What Is to Be Done?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 1–36. It also marks a sharp departure from American feminist understanding of the Russian revolutionary tradition. On this issue, see Julia L. Mickenberg, "Suffragettes and Soviets: American Feminists and the Specter of Revolutionary Russia," *Journal of American History* 100, no. 4 (March 2014): 1021–51.

political life. In that sense, this American-imagined underground was distinctly European, a turn away from the American-centric underground addressed in the previous section. This section details their path away from Marxism and towards anti-totalitarian existentialism, exploring how American existentialist anti-totalitarian intellectuals turned to the underground as a space of permanent resistance to the creeping threat of totalitarianism.

The story of the anti-Stalinist left's understanding of totalitarianism is central to the story of their deradicalization. They adopted it in lieu of Marxist modes of analysis, and as such it was the background against which they would embrace existentialism and imagine their underground by way of Dostoyevsky. Though it first appeared in the 1930s, the concept of totalitarianism is most readily associated with the postwar era, when it became a popular mode of framing political life. American politicians frequently invoked the concept to describe political states held as antithetical to American capitalism and democracy.[220] New York City's anti-Stalinist community had long used the concept. In 1937, Rahv and Phillips, both editors of *Partisan Review*, relied upon the language of totalitarianism to critique the Soviet Union from the left.[221] They would later conflate the Soviet Union and the fascist states of Europe under the totalitarian rubric to argue that

[220] For instance, when President Harry Truman announced what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine in 1947, publicly inaugurating the Cold War, he argued that the United States ought to oppose all "totalitarian regimes" as they "undermine[d] the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States." See Harry S. Truman, "The Truman Doctrine (March 12, 1947)," in *American in the Cold War: Twenty Years of Revolution and Response, 1947-1967* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1969), 52. On the conceptual history of totalitarianism, see Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s-1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[221] When Rahv and Phillips re-established *Partisan Review* they argued it was to combat the "totalitarian trend" present within the CP. See "Editorial Statement," *Partisan Review* 4, no. 1 (December 1937): 3.

their rise rendered Marxism irrelevant. In 1947, philosopher and former Communist Sydney Hook argued that totalitarianism's rise 'produced a new historical situation in which the whole Marxist strategy of achieving democratic socialism must be revised."[222] In the same year, the former Marxist literary critic Granville Hicks similarly argued that writers had to reject Marxist logics of progress if they were to resist "the tendency toward totalitarianism."[223] Such rhetoric brought many anti-Stalinist leftists into alliance with Cold War liberals, pushing them firmly into the realm of anticommunism and marking their final turn away from Marxist frames of analysis.[224]

Drawing from an array of sources, most notably Hannah Arendt's extremely influential *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), the New York intellectuals understood totalitarianism as a state-based threat to individual thought and action, threats they would later argue the "underground man" could resist.[225] For them, totalitarianism referred to a state that sought to regulate the public and private lives of its citizens in the name of rendering dissent psychologically impossible. As Dwight Macdonald put it, "The aim is

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[222] Sidney Hook, "The Future of Socialism," *Partisan Review* 14, no. 1 (February 1947): 26.

[223] Granville Hicks, "The Future of Socialism II: On Attitudes and Ideas," *Partisan Review* 14, no. 2 (April 1947): 117–29.

[224] At a 1952 *Partisan Review* symposium dedicated to exploring the intellectual's role in Cold War America," the journal's editorial board collectively argued that American democracy had "intrinsic and positive value," that such a claim was not a "capitalist myth but a reality which must be defended against Russian totalitarianism." See "Editorial Statement: Our Country and Our Culture," *Partisan Review* 19, no. 3 (June 1952): 284.

[225] See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951). Arendt had multiple connections to the New York intellectuals. Socialist writer Alfred Kazin arranged for the American publication of Arendt's text, and her work appeared frequently in journals like *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and Dwight Macdonald's *Politics*. See David Laskin, *Partisans: Marriage, Politics, and Betrayal Among the New York Intellectuals* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 146–62. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was reviewed extensively in such publications. See David Riesman, "The Path to Total Terror," *Commentary* 12 (January 1, 1951): 392–98; Dwight Macdonald, "What Is Totalitarianism?," *New Leader* 34, no. 29 (July 9, 1951): 15–18; Dwight Macdonald, "What Is Totalitarianism? (2)," *New Leader* 34, no. 29 (July 16, 1951): 16–18; Dwight Macdonald, "What Is Totalitarianism? (3)," *New Leader* 34, no. 29 (July 23, 1951): 12–14.

to reshape men to fit into a rigid, logical, abstract dreamworld," an aim accomplished by "reducing them to animals, or rather bags of reflexes, stripped of reason, feeling, morality, love, self-consciousness, and all other qualities that distinguish man from a cat."[226] It transformed individuals into mobs and masses of isolated and lonely figures, a transformation that facilitated their embrace of authoritarian leaders and states.[227] Such views of totalitarianism resonated with the emerging critique of mass society, a discourse the New York intellectuals aligned themselves with. Works like C. Wright Mills's *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders* (1948) and *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951), David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), and Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1955) explored what they saw as the rising tide of conformity in America.[228] These discourses feared the "massification" of society would strip individuals of their agency, rendering them totalitarian-minded automatons.

Anti-totalitarianism understood this threat to individuality in gendered terms. As historian Benjamin Alpers has argued, anti-totalitarians framed totalitarianism as a threat to masculinity: it was feminizing, producing what quintessential Cold War liberal Arthur

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[226] Macdonald, "What Is Totalitarianism? (2),"18. Sidney Hook argued similarly in an essay written in the early 1950s, specifically focusing on the experience of the individual in the Soviet Union, taken by Hook as "the ideal type" of totalitarianism. See "The Individual in a Totalitarian Society," in *Political Power and Personal Freedom: Critical Studies in Democracy, Communism, and Civil Rights* (New York: Criterion Books, 1959).

[227] Such a view was so common David Riesman argued at a meeting of the American Committee on Cultural Freedom that they risked becoming empty clichés. See David Riesman, "Some Observations on the Limits of Totalitarian Power," in *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1954), 414–25.

[228] Though Fromm and Mills maintained closer relationships to Marxism than New York intellectuals like Reisman and the *Partisan Review* crowd, they were similarly anti-totalitarian. On these writers and the critique of mass society, see Andrew Jamison and Ron Eyerman, *Seeds of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 30–63.

Schlesinger Jr. described as "anxious men."[229] The only female figure referenced, directly or indirectly, in the extensive accounts of Arendt's work amongst the New York intellectuals is Arendt herself. The gendered threat of totalitarianism is evident in another major influence on the New York intellectuals' thinking about totalitarianism: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).[230] The plot of Orwell's text is well-known and need not be explicated. However, a central theme running throughout the text is the degree to which totalitarian regimes drain its subjects of sexual desire: Winston, its central male character, realizes his opposition to the ruling party via his sexual relationship with Julia, a woman he believed to be a committed member of the Junior Anti-Sex League, thereby reinvigorating a degree of masculine agency he felt he had lost. Rahv, who praised the novel as a veiled account of Soviet Communism, highlighted the novel's characterization of totalitarian attitudes towards sexuality as one of the novel's most prophetic elements.[231]

At the same time these de-radicalizing intellectuals embraced the political framework of totalitarianism, they began championing the writings of Dostoevsky, the first step towards their embrace of underground life. They connected Dostoevsky's work to the specter of totalitarianism, arguing that his writings shed light on its political and

[229] Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture*, 280–81.
[230] See George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet Classic, 1961). On the reception of Orwell's novel amongst the New York intellectuals, see Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture*, 290–92. Alpers, however, does not consider their gendered understandings of totalitarianism, focusing exclusively on that of Schlesinger.
[231] Philip Rahv, "The Unfuture of Utopia," *Partisan Review* 16, no. 7 (July 1949): 745.

psychological realities.[232] Most critics did not consider Dostoevsky an existentialist per se, but he was seen as an important predecessor to the philosophical movement then in vogue. As early existentialist anthologist Walter Kaufmann put it, "I can see no reason for calling Dostoevsky an existentialist, but I do think that Part One of *Notes from Underground* is the best overture for existentialism ever written."[233] William Barrett, associate editor of *Partisan Review* and an early American booster of existentialism, made similar claims.[234] In 1938, Rahv argued that *Notes from Underground* (1864) and *The Possessed* (1872) thematically presaged the Russian Revolution's failure. He claimed the latter's exploration of duplicity and of the "vertiginous interplay of appearance and reality" resonated with Stalinism's conversion of "politics into an art of illusion" in the name of a "brutal totalitarianism."[235] He invoked the writer again when reviewing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, linking Oceania Party leader O'Brien with Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor."[236] Rahv would return to Dostoevsky repeatedly throughout the next two decades, periodically using his characters as analogues for various aspects of Soviet Communism.[237] In 1946, Phillips argued that Dostoevsky detailed how the "spirit of science and rationalism acted as a fetter on the truly human," an argument hard not to

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[232] In doing so, they consciously severed Dostoevsky from his immediate historical context. On Dostoevsky's relationship to his immediate political context, see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[233] Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1956), 14.

[234] William Barrett, "What Existentialism Offers Modern Man," *Commentary* 12 (January 1, 1951): 21–22.

[235] Philip Rahv, "Dostoevsky in The Possessed," in *Essays on Literature and Politics 1932-1972*, ed. Arabel J. Porter and Andrew J. Dvosin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 109. This essay originally appeared in *Partisan Review* as "Dostoevsky and Politics." See Philip Rahv, "Dostoevsky and Politics," *Partisan Review* 5, no. 2 (July 1938): 25–36. Monroe C. Beardsley, "Dostoyevsky's Metaphor of the 'Underground,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3, no. 3 (June 1942): 265–90.

[236] Rahv, "The Unfuture of Utopia," 747–48.

[237] See Philip Rahv, "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," *Partisan Review* 21, no. 3 (June 1954): 249–71; Philip Rahv, "Dostoevsky in Crime and Punishment," *Partisan Review* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1960): 393–425.

read in relation to the Nazi's regime of "rationalized" genocide.[238] Writing on his interest in the irrational and the dangers of the overly rationalized state, Phillips wrote that while Dostoevsky's "shamefully reactionary" political ideas did not lend themselves to the current moment, his "highly morbid and personal form" had "become a part of…the modern consciousness."[239] Macdonald invoked the Russian writer when reviewing Arendt's work.[240]

Arguments linking Dostoevsky's writings to postwar totalitarianism appeared outside the circle of these de-radicalizing New York intellectuals. A diverse range of critics made these associations in the midst of a scholarly revival of his work.[241] In 1942, aesthetic philosopher Monroe C. Beardsley declared Dostoevsky's "underground," first figured in *Notes from Underground,* to be one of the "most powerful symbols of the destiny of man," one akin to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, one that could be used to resist the will to reason and power constitutive of the modern totalitarian state. Drama critic Nathan Bryllion Fagin echoed these themes in 1953, suggesting that Dostoevsky's work "had acquired special significance" after "the tragic benefit of experiencing two world wars, the rise and fall of Fascism and Nazism, and the rise and moral fall of

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[238] William Phillips, "Dostoevsky's Underground Man," *Partisan Review* 13, no. 5 (December 1946): 557. Phillips language here immediately recalls that of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published two years previously. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[239] Phillips, "Dostoevsky's Underground Man," 557.

[240] Macdonald, "What Is Totalitarianism? (3)," 13.

[241] Dostoevsky first appeared in English in the late 19th century, but was not widely read in America until the 1920s, when modernists like John Dos Passos, Floyd Dell, and Ernest Hemingway applauded his work as portending the struggles of American modernity. On Dostoevsky's reception in English speaking American circles, see Maria Bloshteyn, *The Making of a Counter-Culture Icon: Henry Miller's Dostoevsky* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 24–44.

Communism."[242] Austrian cultural historian Rene Fueloep-Miller recalled Rahv when he described Dostoevsky's work as a "prophetic condemnation of totalitarianism" in 1950.[243] Political scientist Andrew Hacker explored similar terrain in 1955.[244]

Dostoevsky, it would seem, was a literary and philosophical touchstone for those turning away from the political paradigms of the 1930s, as well as for those never aligned with such paradigms but generally seeking a literary tradition or iconography of political dissent befitting their historical moment. The turn towards the framework of totalitarianism facilitated Dostoevsky's renewed popularity, suggesting that existentialism, insofar as Dostoevsky was tied to that tradition, was the oppositional philosophy of choice of the new political landscape of the postwar era. As the diverse range of critics cited above makes evident, it was a philosophical milieu that inflected and resonated across the intellectual spectrum.

Those praising Dostoevsky's political and philosophical relevance frequently singled out *Notes from Underground* and his "underground man." The novella was particularly popular amongst those interested in existentialism. It opened Kaufmann's *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956), the first anthology of existentialist writings in the United States and an extraordinarily popular text amongst teachers and

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[242] N. Bryllion Fagin, "Dostoevsky's Underground Man Takes Over," *The Antioch Review* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1953): 27.
[243] René Fülöp-Miller, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: Insight, Faith, and Prophecy*, Twentieth Century Library (New York: Scribner, 1950); Rene Fueloep-Miller, "The Posthumous Life of Dostoevsky," *Russian Review* 15, no. 4 (October 1956): 259–65.
[244] Andrew Hacker, "Dostoevsky's Disciples: Man and Sheep in Political Theory," *The Journal of Politics* 17, no. 4 (November 1955): 590–613.

students.[245] Such figures focused on his exploration of the "the underground" and "the underground man," celebrating the latter as a universal tragic figure who was more relevant than ever, for he resisted the totalitarian impulse towards controlling all aspects of public and private human experience: he was the individual that totalitarian regimes could not eradicate, could not control nor integrate into a larger mass. Phillips argued that the Underground Man was an expression of the author's "entire being," a distillation of his hatred of "science, rationalism, positivism, socialism, and the Enlightenment" and his liberating embrace of "the irrational" in the name of gaining "insight into the unregimented side of his nature."[246] For Phillips, the Underground Man was the embodiment of that which actively resisted the rigid regimentation of human life, whether by the state or controlling ideologies. Barrett wrote in the same vein, writing that the Underground Man feared a society in which human life became so "scientifically precise and predictable" that life within it would be unbearable, if not impossible.[247] Dostoevsky's character insisted "upon having his own human life rather than some mechanized substitute for it."[248] As such, he had much to teach contemporary American readers.[249]

For these writers, the Underground Man displayed a rare degree of freedom in a world haunted by totalitarian regimes of social control that sought to strip individuals of

[245] Kaufmann, *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 52–82.
[246] Phillips, "Dostoevsky's Underground Man," 559, 556.
[247] Barrett, "What Existentialism Offers Modern Man," 21.
[248] Ibid.
[249] William Barrett, *What Is Existentialism?* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 15–17.

their freedom, as well as their masculinity.[250] He was the consummate alienated individual, a trait the New York intellectuals celebrated. As historian Terry A. Cooney puts it, "To call oneself 'alienated' was to suggest a heightened awareness, to imply a sophisticated analysis of one's social and intellectual position that was the first step toward solving the problems of alienation."[251] The Underground Man was alienated insofar as he inhabited a space removed from society, one outside its logics in which he retained individual agency amidst social and political forces that sought to eradicate it. He was thereby in a position to, as Barrett put it, "smash [the] machine that would seek to contain him."[252] In such a framework, his masculinity remained fully intact: unnamed, he is identified only by his spatial location and his gender. In a sense, his spatial location precedes his gender, ensuring its protection. Again, despite the claims that he was a "universal figure," he remains an emphatic "he" in the abovementioned writings. Within this masculinist paradigm, he emerges as the rebel par excellence of the totalitarian era, the historical agent of anti-totalitarian politics.

Criminality enabled this alienation. The underground man was always an "anti-hero" that did not conform to popular values or the paradigms of dominant culture. Such qualities facilitated his individuality and thus his ability to resist. Given that Phillips argued that the Underground Man was the avatar of Dostoevsky's individual psychology, his description of the author is revelatory: "his creative world was an abyss of criminality

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[250] Such views of Dostoevsky's Underground Man were not limited to leftist circles. Other critics made similar claims regarding the Underground Man's individual freedom. See, for example, Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Underground Man in Russian Literature* ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton and Company, 1958).

[251] Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 263.

[252] Barrett, "What Existentialism Offers Modern Man," 21.

and derangements."[253] Barrett wrote that the Underground Man embodied "the dark side of our being,"[254] Such descriptions correspond to long standing ideologies that conceptualize the underground as a realm of criminality and its inhabitants as criminals, understandings closely aligned with the original Russian title of *Notes from Underground*.[255] The Underground Man's criminality removed him from a culture and society potentially subject to totalitarian social control. Consequently, he was in a permanent position to resist it, to exist on terms of his own making, regardless of what those terms might be.

The New York intellectuals' interest in criminality was narrowly defined and strictly abstract. Their Underground Man was primarily an idea rather than an actual person. They considered only those individuals and groups criminalized by totalitarianism, especially that of the Soviet Union. The New York Intellectuals had no appreciation of other forms of criminality or criminalization: in turning away from the proletariat, they did not turn toward the lumpenproletariat and were unlikely to even know actually-existing underground men. While later writers like the Beats, who would draw upon this existentialist underground, actively sought out criminals, the New York intellectuals did not. For instance, they were heavily critical of poet, novelist, thief, and homosexual Jean Genet. For instance, in a survey of Genet's work in *Partisan Review*,

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[253] Phillips, "Dostoevsky's Underground Man," 551.
[254] Barrett, "What Existentialism Offers Modern Man," 21.
[255] According to Jenny Hughes and Kyril Zinovieff, the most literal translation of the original Russian title is "Notes from Under the Floorboards," a reference to the Russian folkloric belief that the space beneath one's home was inhabited by rodents and nefarious inhuman beings, manifestations of what is known as "Unclean Power." Jenny Hughes and Kyril Zinovieff, "Introduction," in *Notes from Underground* (London: One World Classics, 2010), xi.

Eleanor Clark described his milieu as a "bottomless moral world."[256] Barrett would later describe him as "energetically and thoroughly wicked."[257]

This tendency towards abstraction characterized their interest in Dostoevsky's existentialism and the conception of the underground that flowed from it.[258] For these New York Intellectuals, fictional and hypothetical underground men were preferable to the real thing. The turn towards a nineteenth century Russian writer to conceptualize American modes of political opposition was a turn away from figures in the United States who might resist similar tendencies at home. As the New York intellectuals became increasingly conservative over the course of the 1950s, increasingly committed to the Cold War image of the American state, they turned away from politics at home and the forces that drove Americans underground, forces catalogued by Wright and Ellison. If Dostoevsky's Underground Man was the anti-totalitarian hero, he was not living beneath the surface of the United States fighting the creeping threat of "massification," but fighting the creeping threat of the Soviet Union, a threat largely imagined abroad.[259] By claiming the figure of Dostoevsky and the subterranean world he imagined, they further delineated themselves from the Soviet Union. Even though the Soviet authorities actively

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[256] Eleanor Clark, "The World of Jean Genet," *The World of Jean Genet* 16, no. 4 (April 1949): 442.
[257] William Barrett, *The Truants: Adventures Among the Intellectuals* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Double Day, 1982), 120.
[258] The New York Intellectuals were, of course, not existentialists. I mean only to suggest that it was a major thread of the intellectual community they were a part of and helped cultivate, a central aspect of their era and milieu's intellectual climate.
[259] At this point in time, the New York Intellectuals were largely unconcerned with what would later come to be described as the "communist underground" within anticommunist discourse. For more on this underground, see the following chapter.

celebrated the Russian literary tradition, they disavowed Dostoevsky.[260] Communists in America took their lead, identifying and celebrating the work of Maxim Gorky in opposition to Dostoevsky.[261] The New York Intellectual's anti-totalitarian underground was removed from the nation they increasingly focused on defending: it was not an American underground, but an underground abroad that was necessary to defend America.

The turn away from American political conditions characterized the era's other major thread of existentialist-informed underground thinking, that aligned with the work of Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre's existentialism was heavily criticized by the New York intellectuals. Though much of his work, as well as that of Simone de Beauvoir, first appeared in English in publications like *Partisan Review*, the circle surrounding the publication rejected the couple's continued commitment to Marxism and their alliance with the French Communist Party.[262] This was a common attitude in the United States: Sartre's ideas flourished in spite of his Marxism.[263] Existentialism was extremely popular throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, especially among students, artists, and non-academic philosophers, and Sartre became as close to a celebrity as a philosopher could

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[260] Fagin, "Dostoevsky's Underground Man Takes Over," 29; James von Geldern, "Conclusion: Epic Revisionism and the Crafting of a Soviet Public," in *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda*, ed. Kevin F. Platt and David Brandenberger (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 330.

[261] B. Byalik, "Gorky and Dostoevsky," *Masses and Mainstream* 5, no. 4 (April 1952): 52–60.

[262] On the relationship between the New York Intellectuals and Sartre, see Cotkin, *Existential America*, 105–33. On Sartre's relationship to Marxism, as well as the relationship between Marxism and Existentialism generally in Postwar France, see Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[263] Kaufmann, *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 48.

become, one whose legacy would impact artists that claimed the label underground.[264] Sartre's philosophy, as it appeared in American publications, cultivated an underground similar in form and content to that associated with Dostoevsky: it was an anti-totalitarian space of political freedom, wherein those criminalized by totalitarian regimes might actively resist.

This existentialist underground emerged in part due to Sartre's reputation as a member of the French Resistance, otherwise known as the French Underground.[265] This bound his philosophy to the underground, the anti-totalitarian movement of World War II par excellence. The French Underground was an object of American fascination, celebrated in the press as a movement of criminal heroes that subverted the Nazi regime.[266] For instance, journalist Walter Davenport reported in 1943 that the Germans "call the agents of the underground criminals. My friends, there is no soldier with a greater decoration than to be denounced by the Boche [a derisive French term for Germans] as a criminal. A criminal for France."[267] When Sartre's writings began appearing regularly in the United States in the late 1940s, journalists and commentators reflected upon his experience as a resistance fighter as much as they did his literary and

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[264] Philosophers in American academe were largely dismissive of Sartrean existentialism. The public, however, embraced it. On Sartre's reception in the United States, see Fulton, *Apostles of Sartre: Existentialism in America, 1945-1963*.

[265] American publications appear to refer to the "French Resistance" and "French Underground" in equal measure. For instance, a 1944 survey of three novels by resistance fighters in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* specifically describes them as a literature of the "anonymous and general underground" emerging all across Europe. See Boris Souvarine, "The Underground in France," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1944): 129–35.

[266] See Donald Reid, "Everybody Was in the French Resistance...Now!: American Representations of the French Resistance," *French Cultural Studies* 23, no. 1 (2012): 49–63.

[267] Quoted in ibid., 51.

philosophical positions.[268] Professional philosophers made such connections in equal measure.[269] As Barrett put it, "The Resistance required a heroic and secular philosophy, in which heroism is born out of despair, out of the experience of nothingness, and Sartre, ready with his version of Heidegger, became the man for that hour."[270] French existentialism soon took on the aura of the Resistance.[271] In the American popular imagination, these two roles – resistance fighter and existentialist philosopher – were tightly bound to one another, almost interchangeable. As such, his existentialism became known as an underground philosophy.

This reputation was no accident. Sartre's early American publications cultivated it. In his early writings, the underground provided the conditions under which individuals might realize individual and collective freedom. For Sartre, moments of extreme contingency compelled "authentic" human choices: when faced with the possibility of death, individuals confronted their sole responsibility for their being, meaning they would have to choose to act in accordance with their own systems of belief.[272] Moments of profound contingency were thereby moments wherein individuals might realize themselves in ways ordinary life could not. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Sartre's first English language appearance: "Paris Alive: The Republic of Silence," an

[268] See, for example, the editorial introductions to Jean-Paul Sartre, "Paris Alive: The Republic of Silence," *Atlantic Monthly* 174, no. 6 (December 1944): 39–40; Jean-Paul Sartre, "New Writing in France," *Vogue*, July 1, 1945. In the introductions to both essays, editors foreground his experience as a member of the resistance.

[269] See Ralph Harper, *Existentialism: A Theory of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 97; Maurice Natanson, "Jean-Paul Sartre's Philosophy of Freedom," *Social Research* 19, no. 3 (September 1952): 367–68.

[270] William Barrett, "Talent and Career of Jean-Paul Sartre," *Partisan Review* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1946): 237.

[271] Cotkin, *Existential America*, 110.

[272] Sartre frequently referred to such moments as "the situation." On the significance of "the situation" in Sartre's thought, see Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, 89–108.

original essay that appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in December of 1944, two months after Wright described his break with the CP in the same magazine. As he begins,

> Never were we freer than under the German occupation. We had lost all our rights and first of all our right to speak. They insulted us to our faces every day – and we had to hold our tongues. They deported us *en masse* – as workers, as Jews, as political prisoners. Everywhere – upon the walls, in the press, on the screen – found that filthy and insipid image of ourselves which the oppressor wished to present to us. And becasue of all of this, we were free.[273]

His characterization of the Nazi occupation recalls prevailing conceptions of totalitarianism. However, he carves a space of agency out of the dehumanizing landscape of Nazism. In his view, the dehumanizing experience of the occupation stripped those in France of all existential pretenses, forcing those within the Resistance to live "without any deceit, nakedly in this torn and untenable situation which one calls the state of man."[274] Such conditions forced Sartre and his comrades to deal with "exile, captivity, [and] above all, death" as the "deepest source of our being." [275] Decisions made under such conditions were "authentic" insofar as they were "made in the presence of death." The experience of occupation granted them a privileged view on the nature of human existence, one that foregrounded the gravitas of each and every individual choice. Life in the resistance thereby facilitated the realization of individual freedom, and ultimately collective freedom. Sartre claimed that the Resistance was a "true democracy," the foundation of a "strongest of republics."[276] Of the resistance fighters he knew, he writes, "Each of them set himself freely, irremediably, against the oppressor. And in his freedom

[273] Sartre, "Paris Alive: The Republic of Silence," 39.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid., 40.

in choosing himself, he chose the freedom of all."[277] The extreme situation of occupation created an entirely alternative oppositional social world, one constructed on principles antithetical to the Nazi regime. It not only cultivated individual freedom, but collectivity as well.

This conception of freedom should be considered a type of underground freedom. Throughout the essay, Sartre is careful to note that the specificities of Nazi occupation of France facilitated these moments of human authenticity and freedom. However, he also describes the space inhabited by the Resistance, and thereby the space in which such freedom was actualized, in figurative terms that recall the imaginary space of the anti-Stalinist Left's take on Dostoevsky's Underground Man. He notes that members of the Resistance lived "clandestine lives," never fighting in the light of the day, always resisting in solitude, the same condition they were "pursued and arrested in."[278] He says that the "Republic" they cultivated was built "in blood and shadows," that it was a "republic of silence and the night."[279] His language suggests that the Resistance existed in a space removed from that which was dominated by the Nazis. It was, by necessity, a criminal space. Sartre never uses the term "underground," but it is not a stretch to conceive of the imaginative space of the Resistance, which was just as often referred to as the French Underground, as the underground. In that sense, "Paris Alive" articulates the existential underground beneath totalitarianism, an always contingent space, as one of freedom, both individual and collective. It was the imaginative location in which

[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid., 39.
[279] Ibid.

existentialist understandings of freedom might be realized and as such was philosophically valuable.

Sartre's underground remained connected to Marxism, but it was a Marxism distinct from that prevalent in the United States in the previous decade, meaning his underground model of agency should be understood as an alternative to Marxism, not an adjunct to it. Sartre was committed less to Marxist doctrine, which he found philosophically limiting, than to the organizational apparatus around it in Europe. His, it would seem, was a Marxism of convenience, a strategic commitment rather than an ideological alliance. As Kauffman described his attitude toward the French Communist Party in 1956, "It is his impassioned opposition to the status quo and his conviction that the Communists, but not the socialists, are serious about overthrowing it that leads him to believe that he must for the present make a common cause with them."[280] Furthermore, the Communist Party of France was heavily active in the French Resistance. The Sartrean underground was thereby one inhabited by political radicals, themselves criminalized by the Nazi regime.

The Marxist inflection to Sartre's existentialist underground ideologically distinguished it from that of the New York Intellectuals, but these two conceptions of the existentialist underground were otherwise very similar. Both relied upon the language and imagery of the underground to imagine alternative models of individual historical agency developed in direct response to the rising tide of totalitarianism, rejecting class-based analyses of repressive regimes in favor of ones attuned to the role of the state and

[280] Kaufmann, *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 48.

individuality. Both were contingent upon the imagination of a criminalized space outside the purview and control of totalitarianism, an implicit declaration that reform or revolution from within the prevailing oppositional political frameworks was impossible, a theoretical rejection of the world aboveground. Such spaces facilitated modes of individual freedom and agency befitting the respective ideological positions of the milieus they came from. This existentially minded underground thereby reiterated many of Wright's and Ellison's claims about the underground, directly echoing their conception of the underground as a space of individual agency and political action, one distinct from but nevertheless connected to the society that rendered it criminal. It was an imaginative space that came into view only after established intellectual paradigms proved insufficient for the abovementioned writers.

Yet there are important and telling differences between these existentialist undergrounds and those imagined by black ex-communists, ones that demonstrate that these undergrounds, though similar in form and function, were not bound to one another. The existentialist underground, whether that of the Underground Man or anti-Nazi criminal rebels, existed beneath totalitarian landscapes removed from the immediate political context of the United States, invoked in response to totalitarianism as a political abstraction or in relation to Nazi-occupied France. Wright and Ellison imagined the underground in direct response to the structures and ideologies of white supremacy in the United States, which racialized their space of freedom and agency in a way that the underground of the New York Intellectuals and Sartreans was not. That is not to say the architects of the existentialist underground ignored racial and ethnic oppression. The

predominantly Jewish intellectual milieu surrounding *Partisan Review* and likeminded publications in New York City were deeply concerned about the anti-Semitism totalitarian regimes stirred and thrived upon, as was Sartre. His "Portrait of the Anti-Semite" was his second essay to appear in *Partisan Review*.[281] However, these anti-totalitarians did not seriously examine ideologies or structures of white supremacy in the United States. They did not consider the ways the American State criminalized non-white individuals and groups, meaning that these authors were working with different models of criminalization: different social and political forces produced their respective undergrounds. Wright and Ellison's existentialist leanings suggest that these two undergrounds were not mutually exclusive, that they might be merged, but I have found no evidence that the champions of Dostoevsky's Underground Man or of the philosopher criminals of the French Underground made such a connection. It would take a later generation of writers and artists, those of the late 1950s and 1960s, to explicitly make it.

THE NEUROTIC UNDERGROUND

The psychological and the psychoanalytical are recurrent themes throughout the previous two sections. Wright and Ellison's underground is a space of psychological reconstitution, one free of societal pressures and forces like racism that impact and shape black subjectivity. In other works, both writers briefly invoked the underground in direct reference to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical treatment, using it to conceptualize the project of the Lafargue Clinic, an outpatient community clinic in Harlem run by Dr. Fredrick Wertham committed to understanding the relationship between racism and

[281] See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Portrait of the Anti-Semite," *Partisan Review* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1946): 163–78.

mental health in African American communities.[282] In a 1946 article about the clinic, Wright invoked it as a metaphor for the Freudian unconscious, arguing that "repressed need goes underground" where it "gropes for an unguarded outlet in the dark" only to "sneak out" and taste a "new freedom," a psychological counterpart to the repression of "social needs" that similarly "go underground."[283] Ellison wrote in a slightly different vein, describing the clinic as an "underground extension of democracy," a secret place where doctors treated mental illnesses in a manner true to American democracy.[284] Critics of totalitarianism often relied upon psychoanalytical theory when theorizing the impact of totalitarian regimes upon individuals and collectives.[285] Claims about the "massification" of national peoples relied upon distinct, sometimes implicit, theories of group psychology. The celebration of the Underground Man's "irrationality" could easily be understood in terms of psychological terms: his "irrationality" was a form of criminal madness.

This theoretical and disciplinary subtext is not surprising: the postwar era saw an explosion of interest in psychology and psychoanalysis, both of which were celebrated as alternative models of individual behavior preferable to Marxist modes of analysis. The rise of psychoanalysis brought new modes of regulating and criminalizing non-normative identities and practices. Psychoanalytic discourses used labels like "psychopath" and

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[282] On each authors' understanding of the clinic, see Catherine A. Stewart, "'Crazy for This Democracy': Postwar Psychoanalysis, African-American Blues Narratives, and the Lafargue Clinic," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (June 2013): 371–95.
[283] Richard Wright, "Psychiatry Comes to Harlem," *Free World*, September 1946, 49.
[284] Ralph Ellison, "Harlem Is Nowhere," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 320.
[285] See, for example, Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950).

"neurotic" to categorize individuals who did not conform to dominant paradigms, especially with regard to sexuality. Again, the underground – as a trope, as a symbol – figured throughout this discourse, deployed within psychoanalytical discourse as a means to spatially locate the site of psychological repression and thereby as an imaginative container for those who could not adequately repress that which did not conform to the dominant psychological order. They did so via the language of neuroses, using the psychoanalytical concept to police non-normative practices and remove so-called "neurotics" from the sphere of dominant social life. Unorthodox publisher Jay Landesman and the community surrounding his publication *Neurotica* appropriated this "neurotic sphere" as one of creative agency, one where those who did not conform to dominant psychological models could cultivate an oppositional community. *Neurotica* explicitly located this deviant realm underground. This section traces this history, exploring the rise of psychoanalysis as a response to the left, the role of the idea of the underground within it, and how Landesman laid claim to that imagined space as one of creative possibility.

The history of psychoanalysis in the United States provided the immediate context for this neurotic underground's emergence.[286] Like existentialism, it provided an alternative model of social and individual behavior distinct from increasingly less

[286] For a detailed account of the popularization of psychoanalysis and psychology in America during this era, see Nathan G. Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 276–299; Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 276–306; Jessica Grogan, *Encountering America: Humanistic Psychology, Sixties Culture, and the Shaping of the Modern Self* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2013); Victoria Campbell Hill, "Defining 'Normal' in Their Own Image: Psychological Professionals, Middle-Class Normativity, and the Postwar Popularization of Psychology" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2009).

appealing Marxist ideas: as individuals seeking authoritative social models turned away from Marxism, many turned to psychoanalysis.[287] In the past, many saw Marxism and psychoanalysis as compatible intellectual traditions. For instance, modernists such as those surrounding *The Masses* embraced Freud and Marx in equal measure. Some intellectuals such as the German émigré Marxist Herbert Marcuse continued this tradition of seeking a Marxist-Freudian synthesis, but this was the exception rather than the rule in American psychoanalytic circles in the 1940s and 1950s, who generally argued that Freud had proven Marx wrong.[288] Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Alexander Reid Martin, a co-founder of the Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis and member of the American Institute of Psychoanalysis, wrote in 1946, "emotional conditions in family life rather than individual economic circumstances are responsible for initiating most of the personality disorders of our young men."[289] As one writer put it in 1949, "The intellectual-religious Marxists of the twenties of thirties who would patiently and accurately explain the dynamics of the class struggle and dialectical materialism, now, with the same patient care and exegetical fervor illuminate the Texts of anal, oral, and Oedipal libido."[290] Like the discourse of totalitarianism, psychoanalysis shifted critical focus away from class and downplayed the role of political-economic structures in the

[287] Wald, *American Night*, xiv; Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States*, 291.
[288] See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).
[289] Helen De Rosis et al., "Tribute to Alexander Reid Martin: Introduction," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 46, no. 2 (1986): 91; Alexander Reid Martin, "Why Psychoanalysis?," in *Are You Considering Psychoanalysis?* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1946), 17.
[290] Herbert S. Benjamin, "Psychiatrist: God or Demitasse?," *Neurotica* 4 (Spring 1949): 35.

emotional and psychological lives of individuals.[291] It emphasized psychological well-being, a concept typically framed in terms of adjustment and normality, which would seem to offer little room for "underground" lives and practices.

Hence psychoanalysis's popularity: adjustment and normality were overarching concerns in the postwar era, and psychoanalysis provided a framework for defining such concepts.[292] The postwar era was one in which, as literary critic Alan Nadel puts it, "'conformity' became a positive 'value' in and of itself," with the adherence to white middle-class norms and ideologies – whether having to do with gender, sexuality, religion, citizenship, or any other number of spheres of social life – becoming apparent national imperatives.[293] Of course, no clear American consensus existed with regards to such norms: any claims to an actually conformed America was illusory, more the terrain of middle-class mythology buttressed by the new culture of abundance, that which supposedly rendered the Left irrelevant, rather than historical experience.[294] Nevertheless, many felt the urge to conform and the anxiety that resulted from failure to do so.[295] It was a major concern among intellectuals, perhaps most famously in the work of sociologist David Riesman, whose bestselling *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American*

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[291] See Hill, "Defining 'Normal' in Their Own Image: Psychological Professionals, Middle-Class Normativity, and the Postwar Popularization of Psychology."

[292] See Anna Creadick, *Perfectly Average: The Pursuit of Normality in Postwar America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).

[293] Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 4. Nadel attributes this directly to the what he describes as "containment culture," that culture which emerged in the United States during the "peak" years of the cold war, 1946-1964, shaped by American Cold War imperatives to "contain" communism abroad and subversion at home. For an exploration of the relationship between "containment culture" and the singular conception of the underground, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

[294] See Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture."

[295] See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, Revised and Updated Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

Character (1950) argued that middle-class Americans were becoming increasingly "other-directed," primarily concerned with pleasing others and adhering to societal demands.[296]

Psychoanalysts used the concept of neuroses to police the boundaries of the normal, especially with regards to gender and sexuality.[297] It functioned as a means of categorizing a variety of non-normative behaviors and identities as deviant and criminal thereby providing the raw material for psychoanalysis's own aboveground/underground dynamic. [298] First theorized by Freud, he argued that neurotic behavior signaled the displaced irruption of a desire or feeling long ago relegated to the unconscious mind. The concept attained new prominence in the postwar era, when psychoanalysts used to refer to anyone who did not readily conform to the dominant cultural paradigm.[299] Neo-Freudian Karen Horney, the foremost theorist of neuroses at the time understood the concept in classically Freudian terms. She argued that the neurotic personality was the complete antithesis of the normal healthy personality, and claimed that it was becoming a

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[296] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

[297] On conformity, gender, and sexuality in the postwar era, see May, *Homeward Bound*; James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005); K. A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1992).

[298] Michel Foucault offers the foundational theoretical account of such processes. He argues that modernity's construction of madness, a concept deployed in a manner akin to neuroses, worked to eradicate undesirable Others, first by removing them from society (to a "madhouse," for instance) then by curing the of their illness. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage, 1988).

[299] Martin, "Why Psychoanalysis?," 18–22; Muriel Ivemey, "What Is a Neurosis?," in *Are You Considering Psychoanalysis?* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1946), 61–92.

problem of national proportions.[300] For instance, she introduced a layman's guide to psychoanalysis with the blanket assertion that "People of our time and civilization are increasingly in need of psychological help."[301] This was a function of neuroses being a broad category. Consider this list of neurotic symptoms by Muriel Ivimey, one of the associate deans of Horney's American Institute of Psychoanalysis:

> Frequently, symptoms are directly connected with relationships with others, such as inability to get along, feeling always an outsider who is excluded by others, intense shyness, uncontrollable aggressiveness; terrible, frightening impulses to harm others, undue dependence on others, inability to love, inability to hate. In this category are specific disturbances in sex life such as frigidity and painful intercourse in women, impotence and premature ejaculations in men, compulsive sexual promiscuity, aversion to sex relationships with the opposite sex and a preference for relationships with persons of one's own sex, and undifferentiated sexuality, sometimes called bisexuality.[302]

Anything remotely "abnormal" could be labeled a neurosis. The number of neurotic behaviors connected to sexual practices suggests that it was a label especially deployed to police sexuality. This framework renders sexual practices that do not conform to patriarchal or heteronormative models abnormal, pathologizing them as something to be cured via psychoanalysis. Such ideas appeared frequently in popular psychoanalysis books. Well-known psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler, for instance, argued that homosexuality, male impotence, and female "sexual frigidity" were neurotic symptoms

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[300] Like Freud, Horney argued that neuroses emerged in response to repressed psychological phenomenon. She saw neurotics as beholden to compulsive behaviors fueled by anxiety. Such processes had their origin in early childhood, when children, confronting either trauma or a lack of healthy relationships, internalize an image of a hostile world they must forever react to so as to allay anxiety. She detailed the phenomenon in several popular books published between the late 1930s and 1950. See Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1937); Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1945); Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950).

[301] Karen Horney, "Introduction," in *Are You Considering Psychoanalysis?* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1946), 9.

[302] Ivemey, "What Is a Neurosis?," 89.

that psychoanalysts could eradicate.[303] Once labeled deviant in such terms, an individual faced potential persecution and prosecution as a criminal, especially so with regards to homosexuality. The neurotic was a deviant figure, one to be policed and controlled in the name of securing American normality, especially with regards to gender and sexuality.

In functioning as a mode of criminalization, the discourse about neuroses and neurotics was central to psychoanalysis's spatial imagination: they were the tools by which it positioned neurotics underground. In the above frameworks, neurotic behaviors emerged in response to repressed behaviors, attitudes, and desires: they were irruptions of an individual's unconscious, a concept sometimes discussed in psychoanalytic circles in terms of the underground. Within the Freudian model, the unconscious mind, that which was below the surface of regular cognitive processes, was the receptacle of socially taboo desires and feelings: it was a deviant space of criminal impulses, especially with regards to sexuality. As far back as the early 20th century, when psychoanalysis was in its infancy, underground appeared as an evocative synonym for the unconscious mind in English-language publications, a trend that continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s.[304] Horney, for instance, used the term periodically in her final book *Neuroses and Human*

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[303] Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 310. Bergler makes these claims in *Neurotic Counterfeit-Sex* (New York: 1951, Grune and Stratton) and Edmund Bergler, *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956).

[304] See Boris Gidis and Simon P. Goodhart, *Multiple Personality: An Experimental Investigation into the Nature of Human Individuality* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 150, 174, 327, 329; Ernest Jones, *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (London: Ballieré, Tindall, and Cox, 1913), 12, 309; Selma Fraiberg, *The Magic Years: Understanding and Handling the Problems of Early Childhood* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1959), 9, 10. Gidis was a pioneering scholar of "abnormal psychology." Jones was a practicing psychoanalyst, popularizer of the discourse, and later the author of a series of best-selling biographies of Freud. Freiberg was an influential child psychologist who focused on the psychological development of disabled children. All authors use the word "underground" to describe the psychological location of repressed desires and drives.

Growth: The Struggle Toward Self Realization.[305] Such language appeared in the writings of amateurs as well. As noted previously, Richard Wright invoked the "underground" in such a manner.[306] Neurotics, beholden to their unconscious in a manner that "normal" individuals were not, were tied to the underground: they were its inhabitants, criminals through and through, a label readily applied with the appearance of a neurosis. Psychoanalytical discourse was thereby able to distinctly conceptualize its own aboveground/underground dynamic, constructing a "normal" surface world with a deviant realm below, one imaginatively severed from the "mainstream" of society.

Antique salesman and publisher Jay Landesman had this subterranean space in mind when he founded *Neurotica* in 1948, a little magazine first based out of St. Louis and later New York City that ran for nine issues between its founding and 1952. Though a short-lived publication, it proved to be extraordinarily influential, and would eventually feature prominent figures associated with the emerging milieu of hipsters and Beats in New York City, including Allen Ginsberg, Carl Solomon, Chandler Brossard, and Judith Malina, as well as intellectuals like Anatole Broyard, Marshall McLuhan, and William Barrett.[307] *Neurotica* was a direct result and response to the public fascination with

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[305] Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization*, 61, 71, 372. Less famous figures used similar language. See Sandor Rado, *Psychoanalysis of Behavior: 1922-1956* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1956), 206, 322; Henry P. Laughlin, *The Neuroses in Clinical Practice* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1956), 63.

[306] Wright, "Psychiatry Comes to Harlem," 49.

[307] This impressive roster of hipster and Beat writers has led some, most notably Beat scholar James W. Campbell, to link *Neurotica* exclusively with the Beats. However, as R. J. Ellis argues, it would be more appropriate to consider it an influence on the Beats rather than a Beat magazine. See James Campbell, *This Is the Beat Generation: New York-San Francisco-Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 93–96; R. J. Ellis, "'Little---Only With Some Qualification': The Beats and Beat 'Little Magazines,'" in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1002–3. Edward Joseph Khair Gitre avoids this question of

psychoanalysis generally and neuroses specifically. As the editors declared in 1949, *Neurotica* was, in their eyes, the first "lay-psychiatric magazine," one committed to "the realization on the part of the people that they live in a neurotic culture and that it is making neurotics out of them."[308] The claim that the United States was itself neurotic hews closely to Horney's claim that the problem of neuroses was rapidly growing.[309] However, unlike Horney, *Neurotica* had no interest in normality or adjustment. Featuring a combination of non-fiction articles, short stories, and poetry, *Neurotica* committed itself to neurotics, "patients – present and future."[310] Landesman announced this commitment to what psychoanalysts considered a deviant community in his first issue, declaring that *Neurotica* was "interested in exploring the creativeness of this man who has been forced to live underground."[311] In locating his publication's potential contributors and authors in the underground, he laid claim to the deviant space below mainstream America that popular psychoanalytical writings consigned neurotics to.

Landesman's conception of the underground had its origins in psychoanalytic discourse about neuroses: it was a space of repression, one ruled by the whims of the unconscious mind. However, he inverted normative judgments about that space. The

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influence by strictly situating the magazine in relation to other postwar trends in psychology. See Edward Joseph Khair Gitre, "America Adjusted: Conformity, Boredom, and the Modern Self, C. 1920-1980" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2008), 263–68. These texts represent the most significant studies of *Neurotica*: it is a strangely understudied journal. Following Campbell, it is usually invoked in an offhand manner as a minor predecessor to the more clearly defined movements of hipsters and Beats. For an example of this, see Phil Ford, *Dig: Sound and Music in Hip Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 58, 62.

[308] "Editorial Gesture," *Neurotica*, no. 5 (Autumn 1949): 3.

[309] For a brief account of the similarities between *Neurotica*'s take on psychoanalysis and that of mainstream psychoanalysis/psychology, see Gitre, "America Adjusted: Conformity, Boredom, and the Modern Self, C. 1920-1980," 268.

[310] "Editorial Gesture," 3.

[311] "Neurotica," *Neurotica* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1948): 3.

journal's opening editorial clearly argues that the spatial location of neurotics in the American imaginary was the result of coercion: the neurotic was the "man who has been forced to live underground."[312] As the editors wrote in *Neurotica*'s fifth issue,

> We define neurosis as the definitive activities of normal individuals against abnormal environments. We assume that human beings are born non-neurotic, and are neuroticized later. We do not agree that it is the measure of social intelligence and psychiatric health to adapt to, and rationalize for, every evil. We do not subscribe to the psychosomatic fashion of throwing the gun on the corpse and blame on the victim.[313]

The editorial's characterization of neuroses reiterates conventional understandings of their origins, but rather than label them as deviations from the norm, it conceives of them as typical responses to a broader social abnormality. The aboveground world was actually hostile to individuals and their ability to act within and transform the world. In this framework, individuals are not the problem, society is: it represses healthy and normal impulses to the detriment of those that constitute it. *Neurotica*'s writers explored these repressions in depth, seeking to present a comprehensive "needle-nose analysis of a culture clearly going insane."[314]

Such a characterization of society falls firmly in line with the prevailing psychoanalytical-based approaches to studying American social and cultural life, and as such should be considered part of the wave of works that eschewed class-based analyses (read: Marxism) in the postwar era. The journal itself featured two articles that explored the primacy of psychoanalysis over Marxian analysis. For instance, British psychoanalyst

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[312] Ibid.
[313] "Editorial Gesture," 3.
[314] Ibid., 4.

Rudolph Friedmann's "The Attack Upon Prostitution as an Attack Upon Culture" claimed that the Left's focus on class was a conscious displacement of the more fundamental category of sex. [315] Herbert Benjamin's "Psychiatrist: God or Demitasse?" explicitly argued that the turn to Freud was in response to a turn away from Marx.[316] Such arguments do not appear in any of the journal's editorial statements, but nothing resembling class analysis appears in its pages. In that sense, the journal's connection to the collapse of the Left was indirect, as opposed to the more direct connections explored in the previous section: it emerged after the vacuum in the era's radical imagination had been partially filled with a commitment to psychoanalysis.

Neurotica featured articles and short stories about an array of subjects – the state of American psychiatry, drug use, and popular culture – but chief among the subjects it explored was sexuality. More specifically, it explored the repression of sexuality, sexualities relegated to the underground of American social and cultural life. A central theme throughout the journal was that American attitudes towards sexuality were destructive, overly rigid and conformist, pale reflections of the range of sexual practices present and available in America. Multiple works detailed how such repression occurred. For instance, a poem by Kenneth Patchen, a major figure in the San Francisco Renaissance and the city's Beat community, righteously condemned "the New Being," a figure he identified as too accepting of America's repressive attitudes towards sexuality,

[315] Rudolph Friedmann, "The Attack Upon Prostitution as an Attack Upon Culture," *Neurotica* 1, no. 2 (1948): 26.
[316] Benjamin, "Psychiatrist: God or Demitasse?," 31.

an acceptance that lead only to collective alienation and distrust.[317] Several articles by British psychoanalyst Friedmann appeared throughout the journal's run, each exploring a different aspect of sexual repression. "The End of Feeling" argued that contemporary forms of marriage inevitable lead to the repression of female sexuality, while his "The Attack Upon Prostitution as an Attack Upon Culture" claimed that the criminalization of prostitution was symptomatic of the repression of the erotic in social life.[318] Other works published in the journal explored sexual subjects and practices conventional morality marginalized or ignored. John Goldston's "World of the Borderline Fetichist" detailed an array of sexual fetishes, focusing specifically on fetish objects, bondage, and sadomasochism.[319] Homosexuality, or "sexual inversion" as it was commonly termed at the time, was a frequent topic. Nathaniel Thornton's "Why Homosexuals Marry" attempted to explain why homosexual men married women.[320] The central character of Richard Rubenstein's surrealist short story "Night Below Night" muses on the death of Jack, a gay man murdered by the mugger he fell in love with.[321] There is certainly a voyeuristic streak running through such articles. However, the publication of such material falls firmly in line with the journal's by all accounts sincere commitment to exploring the lives of those driven underground and into secrecy.

This focus on sexuality can be attributed to the partnership between Landesman and Gershon Legman, an insistently contrarian independent scholar of American

[317] Kenneth Patchen, "The New Being," *Neurotica*, no. 3 (Autumn 1948): 3–4.
[318] Rudolph Friedmann, "The End of Feeling," *Neurotica* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1948): 4–23; Friedmann, "The Attack Upon Prostitution as an Attack Upon Culture."
[319] John Goldston, "World of the Borderline Fetichist," *Neurotica*, no. 3 (Autumn 1948): 46–51.
[320] Nathaniel Thorton, "Why Homosexuals Marry," *Neurotica* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1948): 24–28.
[321] Richard Rubenstein, "Night Below Night," *Neurotica* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1948): 31–38.

sexuality and bibliographer of dirty jokes, erotica, and folklore. He was committed to what might easily be considered underground subject matter. Landesman met Legman in 1949, shortly before the publication of *Neurotica*'s third issue, and they quickly formed an intellectual and editorial partnership. Based in New York, Legman was the author of *Love & Death: A Study in Censorship* (1949), a close analysis of American culture – especially comic books, murder mysteries, and other forms of mass culture – that argued that the prevalence of violence in American culture was the direct result of its suppression of sex.[322] His book detailed the various ways American culture demonized and criminalized sexuality and the representation thereof, and substituted violence and murder in their place. As he concluded *Love & Death,*

> Murder is a crime. Describing murder is not. Sex is not a crime. Describing sex *is*. Why? The penalty for murder is death, or lifelong imprisonment. The penalty for writing about it: fortune and lifelong fame. The penalty for fornication is. . . there is not actual penalty – the penalty for describing it in print: jail and lifelong disgrace. Why is this absurd contradiction? Is the creation of life really more reprehensible than its destruction?[323]

Love & Death's concerns resonated with Landesman's: they were precisely those subjects that American attitudes towards sexuality drove underground. In many ways, the book clarified and rendered explicit what was largely implicit in the journal's early

[322] Gershon Legman, *Love & Death: A Study in Censorship* (New York: Breaking Point, 1949). For reasons of availability, all future citations from this text will draw from a later edition. See Gershon Legman, *Love & Death: A Study in Censorship* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1963). Legman claimed the book had been rejected by 42 publishers before he published it himself in 1949. For an account or Legman's career, see Mikita Brottman, *Funny Peculiar: Gershon Legman and the Psychopathology of Humor* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 2004).
[323] Legman, *Love & Death: A Study in Censorship*, 1963, 94.

issues. Half of *Love & Death* would be published in *Neurotica*.[324] Beginning with the publication of its fifth issue, Legman served as associate editor of the journal, and as Landesman recounts in his autobiography, wielded significant control over the direction of the journal, though not always with Landesman's blessings.[325] When *Neurotica* was eventually forced to cease publication – a consequence of a federal obscenity charge levied against the journal, the result of an issue dedicated to the exploration of the "castration complex" – Legman was at the editorial helm, ironically proving the central thesis of *Love & Death*.

Neurotica's interest in non-normative sexualities certainly put it at the vanguard of American attitudes toward sexuality, but its take on underground thinking displayed the patriarchal limits present in the undergrounds discussed in the previous sections.[326] Landesman's and Legman's vision of human sexuality was not wholly inclusive: it was at times virulently homophobic and aggressively masculine, privileging heterosexual male sexuality. In that sense, it was bound by prevailing ideologies of sexuality as much as it pushed against them. For instance, Landesman, writing with John Clellon Holmes under the penname Alfred Towne, published an article in *Neurotica*'s sixth issue titled "Sexual Gentleman's Agreement" that suggested that American middlebrow culture, especially Clifton Webb films like *Sitting Pretty* (1948) and *Mr. Belvedere Goes to College* (1949),

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[324] Gershon Legman, "The Psychopathology of the Comics," *Neurotica*, no. 3 (Autumn 1948): 3–30; Gershon Legman, "Institutionalized Lynch --- The Anatomy of the Murder-Mystery," *Neurotica*, no. 3 (Spring 1949): 3–20.

[325] See Jay Landesman, *Rebel Without Applause* (Sag Harbor, NY: The Permanent Press, 1987).

[326] *Neurotica* part of a wave of works such as the famed Kinsey report that challenged prevailing ideologies of sexuality Legman worked for the Kinsey Institute as a bibliographer between 1942 and 1945, specializing in obscure texts about sexuality and erotica. See Brottman, *Funny Peculiar: Gershon Legman and the Psychopathology of Humor*, 7–9.

contributed to what Landesman later described as the "effeminization of artistic and sexual values."[327] Landesman and Holmes linked this directly with what they saw at the film's latent homosexuality. Legman's "The Psychopathology of the Comics," an essay that also appeared in *Love & Death*, argued that comics, especially Superman, spread homosexuality, and consequently spread weakness and effeminacy.[328] As much as the publication claimed to advance the interests of and defend "deviants," it at times remained trapped by the patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies underpinning prevailing psychoanalytical writings on neuroses at the time, a fact that stood in tension with its commitment to non-normative sexualities and sexual practices. Its ideal neurotic was thereby profoundly unstable, and typically masculine.

However they defined their "neurotic," *Neurotica* relished its criminalized position beneath so-called "normal" America, celebrating this underground space as one in which individuals could freely exercise their creative powers in opposition to the "abnormal" society that cast them as outsiders. As its opening editorial claimed, the "man who has been forced to live underground…lights an utter darkness with his music, poetry, painting, and writing."[329] It celebrated the intellectual and aesthetic output of so-called neurotics. There is a long tradition of popular and scholarly argument linking neuroses (as well as madness, psychoses, and other altered states of mental health) with creativity, one that holds that repressed unconscious desires and feeling shape aesthetic

[327] Alfred Towne, "Sexual Gentleman's Agreement," *Neurotica*, no. 6 (Spring 1950): 223–28; Landesman, *Rebel Without Applause*, 104–6.
[328] Legman, "The Psychopathology of the Comics," 18–19.
[329] "Neurotica."

activity.[330] In this framework, the creation of art (broadly defined) was itself a neurotic activity. Artistic creations were responses to repressed desires, meaning art objects themselves were neuroses objectified. With the postwar boom in psychoanalysis, such understandings of aesthetics were very much in vogue.[331] Landesman recounts in his autobiography,

> We decided that the time had come for the neurotic personality to defend himself against a hostile world. In various psychiatric magazines we found articles analysing the neurotic's influence in art and literature, going back to Freud. The relationship between art and neuroses was well documented; it was up to us to put it into language that readers of *Neurotica* could understand. We wanted the neurotic writer, artist, etc. to share his vision with other neurotics.[332]

Landesman's description of the forces facing "neurotic personalities" foregrounds the extent to which American society positioned them outside its own imagined borders of normality: neurotics were not under assault by "*their* hostile world," but "*a* hostile world," one they were not permitted entry to. His account suggests that the underground space American society drove them to was one in which neurotics could be themselves, and embrace their neuroses by creating art and establishing connections with likeminded individuals. The journal sought to cultivate a creative community of psychological "deviants," an attempt to connect individuals already relegated to a shared imaginative space: the underground.

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[330] On the history of this argument, see Sandra L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 217–38.

[331] Such theories appeared frequently in aesthetic and cultural criticism throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. Literary and aesthetic critics were as interested in psychoanalysis as everyone else was. See, for instance, Lionel Goitein, *Art and the Unconscious* (New York: United Book Guild, 1948); William Barrett, "Writers and Madness," *Partisan Review* 14, no. 1 (February 1947): 5–22; Frederik J. Hoffman, "Psychoanalysis and Literary Criticism," *American Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1950): 144–54; Lionel Trilling, "Art and Neuroses," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1953), 155–74.

[332] Landesman, *Rebel Without Applause*, 46–47.

"Neurotics Incorporated," an article by psychologist Gerald W. Lawlor in *Neurotica*'s second issue, drove this point home and elaborated upon it, arguing that a neurotic community was precisely what American neurotics needed.[333] Though Lawlor never explicitly assumes the identity of a neurotic in the article, he nevertheless reinforces Landesman's position as described in both his memoir and the opening editorial, beginning with his characterization of neurotics:

> These are frightened people who have felt from early infancy that the world is a dangerous place in which to live and they are inadequate to cope with it. They are a people with strong urges, many of them with creative abilities and keen sensitivities, but they dare not express these to a world they believe is hostile to them.[334]

These are the "maladjusted" individuals Landesman identified as having been driven underground. Lawlor further explains that though is no "central theme" amongst the many neurotics in America, no common neuroses, "there is enough in common to pull them together."[335] Pulling together was absolutely necessary, he argued, as they could not ever fit in "normal" society, for "the so-called 'normal' person can't understand them nor can they understand themselves."[336] Consequently, they ought to form their own society:

> What they need is a society of their own. They need to belong to a group where they are understood for what they are and where they have a chance to express those things that they must keep hidden from their everyday contacts. In this group each member should be allowed to develop courage to talk about and act out things that he feels, and he must in turn develop an attitude of acceptance toward the expressions of the others. Not only should he accept these outpourings

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[333] Lawlor was a Brooklyn College based scholar who specialized in industrial and applied functions psychology, what today is described as industrial and organizational psychology. On Lawlor, see Edward Girden, "Recollections of Psychology at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York," *American Psychologist* 40, no. 2 (1985): 142.
[334] Gerald W. Lawlor, "Neurotics Incorporated," *Neurotica* 1, no. 2 (1948): 11.
[335] Ibid., 12.
[336] Ibid., 11.

> but he should support the others so that they may not develop anxiety from fear of what has been released.[337]

This neurotic society is one built according to the needs of neurotics, a distinct space in which they might productively engage with other likeminded individuals. Lawlor's description here maintains an air of prescriptivist psychological authority: he effectively prescribes the formation of such a society for those he sees as riddled with anxiety, speaking always of "he" and "they," never "I" or "us." Though he initially compares this society as hypothetically similar to Alcoholics Anonymous, another association of supposed deviants, he does not advocate "curing" its members of the neuroses as most psychiatrists and psychologists did at the time, unequivocally stating, "I don't believe that the expressed purpose of this group should be therapy."[338] He advocates no change on their part whatsoever. In effect, he suggests that neurotics should formally claim the space normative ideologies position them within as their own, for it is a space in which they might realize themselves in ways dominant ideologies and social attitudes prohibit.

As Lawlor understood it, such a society would be explicitly oppositional, a potential bastion of social change. For him, it should serve as a psychological safe-haven, a safe space from which those relegated to the neurotic underground could organize in opposition to so-called "normal" society. As he described it

> the stated purpose of the group should be the creation of a haven of rest in a social setting; a place to which the storm tossed neurotic can retire into a group rather than into himself; a security stronghold within which he can cooperatively gird his

[337] Ibid., 12.
[338] Ibid., 13.

> loins for his battle with normal society; a rescue ship that will save him when he feel himself sinking under the waves of sociatal [sic] oppression.[339]

Lawlor's characterization of this "society" reiterates Landesman's central claim that neurotics ought to go on the offense by actively positioning themselves against dominant American culture, that which rendered them neurotic. This underground was thereby a space neurotics might retreat to where some semblance of an oppositional consciousness might be formed. It is a space of collectivity, a space in which so-called neurotics recognize and construct collectivity in ways they could not within dominant culture. It is a space of agency waiting to be realized. Such a conception of an oppositional collectively must be understood in political terms. It is an organized oppositional body ready to be mobilized against "normal society."

Neurotica itself ought to be understood in such terms: it saw itself as cultivating a neurotic community, one it explicitly located "underground" beginning with its first issue. Over the course of nine issues, its ruminations on supposedly deviant or criminal subject matters, its national distribution network, and its reputation helped bring into being, if only imaginatively, the sort of collective the editorial statements pointed towards.[340] In its ninth and final issue, the editors published a series of responses to a poll they conducted of its readers. They published responses from twenty-six states and the District of Columbia, demonstrating that their circulation, and thereby the underground

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[339] Ibid.

[340] The small periodical was popular enough that it received coverage in national journals such as *Time* and *Writers Journal*. According to Landesman, Henry Luce was interested in purchasing and distributing *Neurotica*. See Landesman, *Rebel Without Applause*, 49, 91–92.

community neurotic imagined, was national in scope.[341] The number of now recognizable figures who published in this obscure publication suggests that it commitment to those driven underground sparked something: figures like Malina, Ginsberg, and McLuhan would go on to help shape the underground of the 1960s. The diverse range of subjects represented within its pages during its brief run shaped an imaginative space, one produced via the marginalization and criminalization of the non-normative behaviors, in which its community members – contributors and readers – might realize themselves in ways prevailing norms, especially with regards to sexuality, prohibited. Its contributors understood such an act as the pre-condition for opposition, an army of "patients," as its editorial statement suggested. Within *Neurotica*, neurotics exercised a degree of historical agency its conception of aboveground America denied them. In a sense, for figures like Landesman, they were the quintessential historical agent of their moment: if all of society was neurotic, if society was itself the problem, who better to lead the charge against it than so-called neurotic individuals?

THREE UNDERGROUNDS (BUT NO UNDERGROUND)

This chapter has explored three distinct conceptions of the underground that appeared in postwar America. Wright and Ellison turned to the underground in immediate response to what they perceived as the limits of American communism, a movement they were initially attracted to due to its commitment to black workers across the globe, but broke from when that commitment began to ring hollow. Despite their very

[341] Most of the responses were positive, praising its subject matter and commitment to publishing such material. See "Progress Report," *Neurotica*, no. 9 (Winter 1952): 3–12.

different political projects, they found in the underground what they could not in the Communist Party: a space in which black men might self-actualize in preparation for political action. The emerging coterie of American existentialists, a diffuse and at times conflicting intellectual community, evoked the imaginative space of the underground in response to the specter of totalitarianism, an intellectual framework that facilitated the American intelligentsia's turn away from Marxism. It was an underground populated by figures like Dostoevsky's Underground Man and Sartre's resistance fighter, the existentialist figure par excellence, two figures held as capable of resisting the threats of totalitarianism. Jay Landesman and the contributors of *Neurotica* similarly claimed an underground within another theoretical framework that assumed the position Marxism once held for those opposed to the American status quo: psychoanalysis. His publication's neurotics, inhabitants of psychoanalysis's own underground, were those most capable of resisting its regime of normality.

These three undergrounds certainly resonated with one another and at times explicitly overlapped. The most obvious point of connection was, of course, the shared turn to the underground in response to the same political and ideological crisis. There were a range of oppositional political vocabularies and conceptual frameworks available in the postwar era. Yet they all invoked the same concept in response to the same political and intellectual question: what mode of historical agency is most appropriate for the current moment? All three undergrounds were functionally the same: in each case, the underground provided a refuge from an alienating and above-all incriminating American society. At the same time, those in the underground did not go there by choice or

happenstance: inhabiting the underground was the result of exclusion and criminalization, sometimes violently so. Despite this, the underground, a criminal space removed but nevertheless connected to dominant culture, facilitated the realization of individual agency and political opposition to the forces that drove them there in the first place. The flight underground and its ideologically productive use thereby involved a process of re-appropriation and reclamation. It involved the embrace of criminality as a mode of historical agency: the criminal's insistent position beneath the boundaries of American social life enabled distinct types of individual and social action appealing to those for whom the classic Marxist proletarian could not. Furthermore, all three undergrounds understood this agency in strictly masculine terms: the underground in the work of Wright, Ellison, the New York Intellectuals, American discourse of existentialism, and in *Neurotica* was strictly inhabited by men, as if such works could not imagine a politically generative female criminality. Underground agency, it would seem, was masculine agency.

Such points of continuity suggest that the authors discussed in this chapter might have productively engaged with one another, imagining not three undergrounds but a single one, *the* underground. However, they did not. While there are implicit connections between each, ones readily apparent to historians and critics, those imagining these undergrounds in the postwar era did not explicitly recognize such connections nor make any effort to link their political projects to each other's. Each imagining of the underground was highly context-specific, in response to very specific institutional and ideological forces, with distinct modes of criminalization. That is, each group of authors

highlighted the possibilities of a distinct type of criminal or deviant (the racialized criminal, the anti-totalitarian, and the neurotic) and did not foreground the points of intersection between them, nor explore the ways in which the frameworks that constituted them (white supremacy, totalitarianism, psychoanalysis's regime of normality) might support or reinforce one another. Their undergrounds were formally consistent and fulfilled the same functions, but they differed in content. Though they emerged from and in response to the same political and intellectual problematic, their architects forecasted political trajectories that ran parallel to one another.

Nevertheless, the appearance of the trope of the underground in such different contexts and the points of intersection between them suggest the emergence of a larger trend, one traceable to the collapse of the Left's radical imagination, and as this dissertation argues, one that persisted throughout the peak years of the Cold War. New conceptions of political agency and reformulations of the spaces in which it was realized and exercised were necessary in such an ideological climate. Entrance to the worlds of the criminal, of the deviant, of the marginalized other, labels consistently applied across American society, offered one route of addressing this problem. This historical moment marked the appearance of affirmative artistic and political undergrounds, imaginative spheres later artists, activists, and intellectuals would enter into and appropriate in ways different those outlined in this chapter. These were not the only strands in what, by the latter half of the 1950s, fused into a relatively coherent, expansive, and influential sense of the underground, one whose masculinist underpinnings would become even more pronounced, but they were the key strands. The undergrounds explicated in this chapter

would coalesce, not it the imagination of artists and intellectuals, but in the imaginary of the Cold War nation state. The following chapter explores this underground, an imagined space a different community of writers would appropriate in opposition to the structuring logics of Cold War America.

Chapter 3 – One Nation Underground: Containment Culture and the Spatiality of Hip, 1946-1964

"The Communist Party, U.S.A., is like an iceberg. Only a small portion can be seen, but the bulk is beneath the surface." – Attorney General Herbert Brownell, Jr., 1955.[342]

"The cool world is an iceberg, mostly underwater." – Ned Polsky, 1961.[343]

In March 1958, Jack Kerouac published "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation" in *Esquire* magazine.[344] The essay described the new "generation of crazy illuminated hipsters" in terms familiar to contemporary accounts of postwar hipness, the beats, and related communities.[345] For Kerouac, these "hip swinging cats" rejected the "supercolossal, bureaucratic, totalitarian, benevolent, [and] Big Brother structures" of Cold War America.[346] Seeking alternatives, they began "taking drugs, digging bop, having flashes of insight, experiencing the 'derangement of the senses,' talking strange, being poor and glad, [and] prophesying a new style for American culture"[347] They heralded a worldview akin to that of French existentialists like Jean Genet and Jean-Paul

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[342] Herbert Brownell, Jr., "Attorney General Says: Reds Are Trying to Wreck Informant System of FBI," *U.S. News and World Report*, April 1, 1955, 68.

[343] Ned Polsky, "The Village Beat Scene: Summer 1960," in *Hustlers, Beats, and Others* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), 153.

[344] Jack Kerouac, "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," *Esquire*, March 1958. The essay was a response to an article by John Clellon Holmes that appeared in *Esquire* the previous month. Holmes linked hip, hipsters, and the Beat Generation to juvenile delinquency and criminality. See Gerald Nicosia, *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 559; John Clellon Holmes, "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," *Esquire*, February 1958.

[345] Kerouac, "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," 24. Throughout this chapter, I will use "hip" and variations thereof to describe the broad milieu from which figures like Kerouac emerged. I will use "beat" to describe writers who either pledged allegiance to the "Beat Generation" or are considered key figures within it (e.g. Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, etc.). Such terms were fluid and overlapping in the 1950s, all different ways of describing broadly the same social phenomena. One might say that all beat writers were hip, so to speak, but not all hipsters were beat. One of my goals is to situate white conceptualizations of hip and beat within the underground.

[346] Ibid., 24, 26.

[347] Ibid., 24.

Sartre, crafting a unique philosophy attuned to the experience of black jazz musicians and "Negro Hepcat saint[s]."[348] Kerouac's formulation reiterates the binary opposition characteristic of much postwar hip thinking, as well as scholarship about it, pitting the dissenting milieu against a monolithically defined Cold War America.[349] It foregrounds themes familiar to scholars of hip: nonconformity, creative drug use, a commitment to individuality, self-conscious mythmaking, a tendency towards racial primitivism and fetishism, and a creative sense of madness.[350] While scholars have thoroughly critiqued such themes, especially with regard to race, gender, and sexuality, they remain central in scholarly discourse about postwar hipness.[351]

Kerouac's essay also singles out one element that scholars have largely ignored: hip's spatial imagination.[352] He called these hipsters "subterranean heroes" and "angels of

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[348] Ibid.

[349] On this tendency in scholarship about postwar countercultural subcultures, see Manuel Luis Martinez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 7–8; Robert Bennett, "Teaching the Beat Generation to Generation X," in *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002).

[350] See, for instance, classic accounts such as John Tytell, *Naked Angels: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1976); Ann Charters, "Introduction: 'Variations on a Generation,'" in *The Portable Beat Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), xv–xxxvi.

[351] See the work of Maria Damon, especially *Postliterary America: From Bagel Shop Jazz to Micropoetries* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011). See also Kostas Myrsiades, ed., *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); Jennie Skirl, ed., *Reconstructing the Beats* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[352] Scholars of hip and the beats are quick to describe them as "underground," but rarely analyze the significance of the term, and instead rely upon its colloquial definition as an obscure and resistant milieu. For instance, John Tytell claims that Kerouac sought refuge with "underground men" but never interrogates this specific category. A similar phenomenon occurs in Ronna C. Johnson's excellent analysis of Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*, which repeatedly describes the hip milieu in terms of the underground, but does not address it as a distinct formation. See Tytell, *Naked Angels: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs*, 52; Ronna C. Johnson, "'And Then She Went': Beat Departures and Feminine Transgressions in Joyce Johnson's Come and Join the Dance," in *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 69–95. There are exceptions. Novelist Ronald Sukenick explores hip in terms of the underground as a distinct historical formation, though his account is largely anecdotal, more interested in mappings relationships between particular places and authors than historicizing the concept. Penny Vlagopolous explores the spatiality of beat, but restricts her

the American underground," locating them in the underground of Cold War America. Such language appeared throughout his oeuvre.[353] He was not the first, nor the only one to do so. The trope appears in the work of Anatole Broyard, Chandler Brossard, John Clellon Holmes, Joyce Johnson, and other writers who saw hipness as a means of opposing the current of Cold War America. As critic Malcolm Cowley wrote in 1955 of the new literary scene he took such writers to represent, they "talked about being 'underground'."[354]

In this chapter, I argue that the idea of retreating to or inhabiting the underground was central to postwar understandings of hipness among white writers like those already mentioned. As cultural critic Phil Ford has argued, "hipness is not an idea, style or habit, but rather a *stance* toward the square, uptight, unfree world."[355] Ford offers a key insight, but the spatial relationships his formulation relies upon warrant further investigation, for if hip denotes a stance, one has to ask where hipsters were standing. Hip writers were attuned to this. Holmes claimed that Kerouac described hipsters as being "*in* the street but not *of* it."[356] Beat writer Seymour Krim wrote in 1961 that the postwar American "artist-

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focus to Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*. See Sukenick, *Down and In: Life in the Underground*; Vlagopoulus, "Voices from Below: Locating the Underground in Post-World War II American Literature."

[353] See Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 54. His *The Subterraneans* (1958) renames hipsters in the parlance of the underground. Kerouac also uses the language of the underground in "The Origins of the Beat Generation" (1959), another attempt to define the cultural milieu that appeared in *Playboy*. See Jack Kerouac, "The Origins of the Beat Generation," in *The Cool School: Writings from America's Hip Underground*, ed. Glenn O'Brien (New York: Library of America, 2013), 131.

[354] Cowley, "The Next Fifty Years in American Literature," 241.

[355] Emphasis mine, Ford, *Dig*, 4.

[356] Emphasis in source. John Clellon Holmes, "The Name of the Game (1965)," in *Passionate Opinions: The Cultural Essays* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 54.

type" was "of society and yet, by instinct and inheritance, apart from it."[357] As Ford observes, such formulations are paradoxical.[358] Hipsters opposed the society they stood within, but imagined themselves outside it even as they were immersed within it. Recognizing their imagined location within the American underground resolves the paradox in this formulation: they imagined themselves a community of *outsiders inside* the nation, hidden *beneath* it.

While hipsters laid claim to the underground, they did not construct it. This was largely the work of anticommunists. The idea of the underground was central to anticommunist writings throughout what Alan Nadel has described as the peak years of Cold War "containment culture," the period from 1946 to 1964 wherein the urge to halt communism's spread wielded significant influence over American cultural production.[359] Anticommunist writers from Arthur Schlesinger Jr. to J. Edgar Hoover imagined communists inhabiting an underground world whose existence threatened the security of the United States. It housed a broad range of allegedly deviant behaviors and identities: queerness, blackness, drug use, organized crime, madness and neuroses, and political dissent. As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the underground was a spatial concept used to cognitively organize social and cultural life. For mainstream Americans, this particular underground worked to vertically position acceptable and un-acceptable Americans, with the latter situated within the space of the nation in the same terms white

[357] Seymour Krim, "The Insanity Bit," in *Views of a Nearsighted Cannoneer* (New York: Excelsior Press Publishers, 1961), 73.
[358] See Ford, *Dig*, 44–83.
[359] See Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*.

hipsters saw themselves: as a community of *outsiders inside* the nation, hidden *beneath* it.

This chapter details how white hipsters appropriated this existing underground as their own, and in doing so, popularized and helped consolidate the idea of "going underground" into the era's radical imagination. This inaugurated the notion of the underground that would flourish throughout the 1960s as an imagined space for creative work. This "hip underground" functioned similarly to those undergrounds discussed in the previous chapter, those imagined by black ex-communists, anti-totalitarians, and amateur psychoanalysts in the immediate postwar era. However, the hip underground differed in content and scope. Like such figures, hipsters imagined the underground as a masculine defined space of political and creative freedom removed from the dominant space of the nation, one in which they could live un-alienated lives. Again, it filled a void left in the radical imagination after the collapse of America communism amidst the pressures of the Cold War. However, while the undergrounds discussed in the previous chapters housed narrowly defined criminal communities, that imagined by hipsters housed the broad range of deviancies that containment culture linked together. They found freedom in this diversely deviant world. In doing so, they embraced a logic that accepted non-normative practices and identities as marks of deviancy in the first place, merely inverting rather than reformulating the underlying premises of the culture they ostensibly opposed. They did not question their social locations within Cold War culture. After all, the hip underground was what we could call an "elective underground." The language and imagery of the underground only appears in the writings of white writers

and intellectuals in relative positions of privilege, usually white men. In their writing, they chose to enter the underground, meaning they could leave it if they wanted, an opportunity not available to those forcibly driven into it.

In that sense, the hip underground was a product of containment culture, undermining its claims to radical exteriority. White hipsters embraced a Cold War vision of America and ultimately embarked on a nation-building project akin to that of the architects of Cold War political policy. Kerouac's vision of the beat generation as described in *Esquire* took care to note that this new underground was distinctly American. As hip became more popular amongst white audiences over the course of the 1950s, it became explicitly aligned with the American nation-state, figured not as an abstract realm in which new forms of being-in-the-world might be realized, but as an alternative nation, one shorn of the violent and imperialist practices constitutive of the Cold War American nation-state, as if the nation-building project of containment could have a kinder and gentler face.

This chapter thereby situates postwar hipness, as well as related concepts like beat and cool, in the history of the underground as a cultural concept. In doing so, it offers new insights on their relationship to the dominant culture of Cold War America. It draws from an array of anticommunist literature and film, as well as canonical and less-studied works by writers affiliated with hip and the beats. It begins with an exploration of the Communist underground, and follows with a discussion of its appropriation by white writers seeking a new mode of historical agency. In the following section, I detail the ways white hipsters saw this mode of historical agency as an alternative to prevailing

radicalisms. Next, I detail how artists of the late 1950s framed the underground in national terms, imagining an alternative nation. I conclude with a consideration of the ways figures initially left out of the hip underground's imaginary re-appropriated and revised it, a process that would characterize the underground of the 1960s.

THE COMMUNIST UNDERGROUND AND A DEVIANT AMERICA

The American 1950s is often remembered as an era of middle-class abundance, security, and safety. Such attitudes are not a recent invention. In 1952, New York Intellectual Mary McCarthy praised the United States in now familiar terms, claiming it was moving towards class and racial equality, a consequence of a booming consumer economy and the nation's political power.[360] Such attitudes were illusory then as they are now.[361] Claims to American racial and class homogeneity discounted the inequalities facing the American public. The political legacy of the Popular Front, an emerging Civil Rights movement, changing ideologies of gender and sexuality, and a new economy oriented around consumption belied the romanticized vision of postwar America. Nevertheless, the utopian image of American capitalism carried a lot of weight, in part because it served an ideological purpose within the geopolitical terrain of the Cold War. It supported what historian John Lewis Gaddis has described as the Cold War's "grand strategy" of containment which sought to halt Communism's spread at home and

[360] Mary McCarthy expressed such views in a 1952 response to Simone De Beauvoir's criticisms of the nation. See Mary McCarthy, "Mlle. Gulliver En Amérique," *The Reporter*, January 22, 1952, 36.
[361] See Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture."

abroad.[362] Containment was a far reaching ideology that left little in American life untouched.[363] As Nadel argues, it functioned domestically as a narrative and political strategy that sought to contain contradictions and conflicts in the nation, relying upon a Manichean logic that facilitated the proliferation of similarly structured, overlapping oppositions: America versus Soviet Union, capitalism versus communism, American versus un-American.[364] Such binaries buried those aspects of American social and cultural life that countered the image of America as a middle-class capitalist utopia.

The idea of the communist underground was central to this "grand strategy." The vision of America presented by containment culture was an image of the nation's surface,

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[362] On containment, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[363] See Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. As Stephen J. Whitfield suggests, not all of American cultural life in the 1950s could or should be placed under this rubric. See Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 12. However, the structures of containment had a long reach. Here, I am concerned with that culture with ties to containment. On the complexities of such an approach to Cold War cultural studies, see Steven Belletto, *No Accident, Comrade: Chance and Design in Cold War American Narratives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 147–54. For examples of works that productively center Cold War ideology in American culture, see the aforementioned texts, as well as Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); May, *Homeward Bound*. Such works serve as models for my own. For a critique of this approach, see Peter Filene, "'Cold War Culture' Doesn't Say It All," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), 156–74; Robert Genter, "The Cold War Culture of Containment Revisited," *American Literary History* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 616–26.

[364] See Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. For example, Robert Stripling, Chief Investigator for the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, responding to the hypothetical question "Why shouldn't I turn Communist?" writes, "You know what the States is like today. If you want it exactly the opposite, you *should* turn Communist." Emphasis in source. Robert R. Stripling, *The Red Plot Against America* (Drexel Hill, PA: Bell Publishing, 1949), 267. Scholars have theorized these binaries at length. Andrew Ross argues Cold War culture relied upon "the interplay between what was foreign, and outside, and what as domestic, and inside." Literary critic Donald Pease describes Cold War foreign policy as involving a dialectic of Other and Same. Political theorist Frederik M. Dolan argues for what he calls a "Cold War metaphysics" reliant upon a tension between deceptive and authentic appearances." See Ross, *No Respect*, 16; Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Frederick M. Dolan, *Allegories of America: Narratives, Metaphysics, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 60–113.

and that which did not fit was relegated to an imagined space beneath it. This opposition – aboveground versus underground – was an important, though understudied, binary within American Cold War culture, one that structured dominant attitudes about normalcy and deviancy throughout the decade.[365] I argue that anticommunists deployed the idea of the underground to contain that which contradicted the dominant vision of the nation. This section details this underground as anticommunist discourse constructed it, detailing the deviant world white hipsters would later claim as their own. This underground had three, at times contradictory, key traits. First, it was envisioned as a world radically divorced from the dominant space of the nation. Second, this world houses a range of allegedly deviant practices and identities. Third, it was bound to the space of the nation, ultimately emerging as a deviant version of the nation itself.

Throughout the postwar era, politically diverse anticommunist writers invoked the underground to describe the CPUSA's espionage apparatus that worked to overthrow the

[365] The idea of the underground in containment culture has received little attention by cultural historians, a curious gap given the many studies of American attitudes towards communism during the Cold War. For instance, Marjorie Garber's and Rebecca L. Walkowitz's edited collection *Secret Agents: The Rosenberg Case, McCarthyism, and Fifties America* features multiple essays on Cold War espionage, but none of them explore the underground as a concept itself. See Marjorie B. Garber and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds., *Secret Agents: The Rosenberg Case, McCarthyism, and Fifties America* (New York: Routledge, 1995).The communist underground has been studied extensively by so-called "traditionalist" historians of Cold War Communism and anti-Communism such as John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr. Such works focus on the underground in its most literal sense, as a secret Communist espionage apparatus, using it in the same sense that anticommunists did in the 1950. The work of Haynes and Klehr is dedicated to "exposing" the extent of Communist espionage in a polemic against so-called "revisionist" historians of American communism and anticommunism like Maurice Isserman and Ellen Schrecker rather than analyzing the ideology of the underground. See Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *In Denial: Historians, Communism, and Espionage* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005). Isserman reflects on these debates in "Open Archives: 'Traditionalists' versus 'Revisionists' after Venona," *American Communist History* 4, no. 12 (2005): 215–23.

nation.[366] Liberal Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (1949) details the CP's "underground arm" that worked "as the American section of the Soviet secret intelligence corps."[367] Communist spy turned dedicated anti-communist spokesman Whittaker Chambers wrote about his experience in the "special institution" of the "underground" in his bestselling *Witness* (1952), detailing a disciplined espionage network that "affected the future of every American now alive."[368] Ex-Trotskyist James Burnham claimed that "Communists aim, through the underground, to infiltrate every region and level of society," including the federal government.[369] Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover echoed such ideas in his 1958 anticommunist treatise *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It*, detailing how Communists sought to infiltrate American industry, law enforcement and the military, ideas explored further in his 1962 work, *A Study of Communism*.[370]

Secrecy characterized this underground. Hoover described it as, "a maze of undercover couriers, escape routes, hide-outs, and clandestine meetings," inhabited by

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[366] As Schrecker reminds us, there were liberal, conservative, religious, and even left-wing anticommunists throughout the Cold War. The idea of a communist underground recurs throughout anticommunist discourse. On the plurality of anticommunisms, see Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, xiv. It is important to note that Communist Party members themselves used the term underground within their own circles to describe its secret and clandestine activities. However, they did not popularize the term.

[367] Arthur M. Jr Schlesinger, *The Vital Center: The Politics Of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988), 126.

[368] Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York: Random House, 1952), 276, 331. Chamber's text features two chapters explicitly titled "underground": "Underground: The First Apparatus" and "Underground: The Second Apparatus." See Ibid., 275-324, 331-404.

[369] James Burnham, *The Web of Subversion: Underground Networks in the U.S. Government* (New York: The John Day Company, 1954), 16.

[370] See J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Study of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1958), 291; J. Edgar Hoover, *A Study of Communism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962).

dedicated communists "carrying on the Party's deceitful work away from the watchful eye…of the FBI and other Governmental agencies."[371] Its members were indistinguishable from so-called ordinary Americans.[372] For former Communist spy, professional witness, and paid FBI informant Louis Budenz, they were "men without faces" and "faces without names."[373] Chambers recounted how upon entering the communist underground, his handler demanded that he "separate [him]self from all contacts with the Communists and the Communist Party, and live as much as possible like a respectable bourgeois."[374] In the underground, they adopted new names and new identities, and communicated to each other in coded language, what anticommunists typically referred to as "Aesopian language," speech intended to express the opposite of its apparent meaning.

This secrecy was tied to its criminality. One of the defining traits of Cold War anticommunism was the way in which communism was treated as a criminal rather than political issue.[375] As political and cultural theorist Michael Rogin puts it, "political dissent" became an issue of "criminal disloyalty."[376] With the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dennis v. United States*, which upheld the conviction of the leadership of the CPUSA under the Smith Act by arguing that their speech was not protected given that they were conspiring to violently overthrow the federal government, communism came to be seen

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371 Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Study of Communism in America and How to Fight It*, 274.
372 As historian Tom Engelhardt suggests, they were "invisible enemies." See Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*, 113–32.
373 Louis Francis Budenz, *Men Without Faces* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 18.
374 Chambers, *Witness*, 282–83.
375 Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, 120.
376 Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, The Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 72.

as a matter for law enforcement.[377] The communist underground was specifically dedicated to such activities. Hoover's work, again, illustrates the anticommunist attitude: "The communist underground is designed to carry forward phases of the Party's program which cannot be conducted openly and lawfully."[378] The underground used its secrecy to engage in a range of illegal activities, namely infiltration, sabotage, and espionage.

Throughout the postwar era, the image of a secret, criminal Communist conspiracy became the only image of Communism that mattered. The communist underground became synonymous with American Communism writ large, and it specifically was the source of the decade's anticommunist anxiety. The "underground" was the object of domestic containment. As FBI agent Jacob Spolansky put it in 1951, the Party's "principal activities…have never been anywhere but underground."[379] According to the FBI, "aboveground activities" such as public marches and organizing efforts were "fronts" for the Party's actual concerns.[380] This was the communism described by ex-Communist federal witnesses like Chambers and Budenz, that allegedly practiced by convicted spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. This perception of Communism animated the Cold War imagination and drove the spectacle of McCarthyism: Joseph McCarthy's alleged list of Communist spies within the federal government was a list of underground members; many of the questions asked during the "McCarthy Hearings" of 1953 and

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[377] As Schrecker recounts, these claims were made without any hard evidence and relied upon stereotypes regarding communist duplicity. See Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, 190–210.
[378] Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Study of Communism in America and How to Fight It*, 291.
[379] Jacob Spolansky, *The Communist Trail in America* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 14.
[380] Burnham, *The Web of Subversion: Underground Networks in the U.S. Government*, 16; Don Whitehead, *The FBI Story: A Report to the People* (New York: Random House, 1956), 268; Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Study of Communism in America and How to Fight It*, 273.

1954 focused on the underground itself.[381] There certainly was espionage, but most of it occurred in the 1930s and 1940s, when there was little writing about the Communist underground.[382] This changed in the 1950s, suggesting that the underground that occupied the political imaginations of Americans in that era was largely mythological. Despite claims that the underground was unknowable, anticommunist writers detailed it extensively. It was a frequent point of reference for the many ex-communist memoirs released throughout the decade, including the aforementioned texts, and a thematic staple

[381] See U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations (McCarthy Hearings 1953-54)*, ed. Donald Ritchie and Elizabeth Bolling, vol. 3 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003), 1810, 1873–75, 1915, 2384; U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations (McCarthy Hearings 1953-54)*, ed. Donald Ritchie and Elizabeth Bolling, vol. 4 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003), 3037, 3497, 3571; U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations (McCarthy Hearings 1953-54)*, ed. Donald Ritchie and Elizabeth Bolling, vol. 5 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003), 44, 476, 485,.

[382] Research reliant upon recently opened Russian archives reveals the extent to which American communists conducted espionage for the Soviet Union. See Klehr, Haynes, and Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism*; Alexander Vassiliev and Allen Weinstein, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America - The Stalin Era* (New York: Random House, 1998); John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, New Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). As Schrecker notes, Soviet espionage "essentially came to an end in 1945" after "the defection of several key agents and the normal security procedures of the FBI effectively wiped out the KGB's underground apparatus within the federal government." See Ellen Schrecker, "Preface to the Paperback Edition," in *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), x. Most writing about the communist underground appeared in the postwar era, but there are exceptions. For an early example of anticommunist writing about the communist underground, see Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess: The Truth about American Communism* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1940). Much like Chambers and Budenz, Gitlow was a Communist Party member who broke with the organization. He cooperated with the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1939.

for anticommunist literature.[383] Explicit references to the underground appeared in literature that was not explicitly about communism, as well throughout popular culture.[384]

The postwar proliferation of writing about the underground suggests that the idea of the underground was useful for the architects of the Cold War imaginary, something first seen in the ways anticommunists treated it as an abstract space rather than as an actually-existing institution. They frequently deployed the term metaphorically, invoking an entirely different world, an imagined space distinct from the nation as it existed in the dominant imaginary. The writings of journalist and former member of the German Communist Party Arthur Koestler in the influential anticommunist anthology *The God That Failed* (1949) offers an illustrative example in his description of the "the Party" as it was "preparing to go underground":

> its activities were for the most part of an illegal, underground character. The new recruit to the Party found himself plunged into a strange world, as if he were entering a deep-sea aquarium with its phosphorescent light and fleeting, elusive shapes. It was a world populated by people with Christian names only—Edgars and Pauls and Ivans—without surname or address.[385]

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[383] See Louis Francis Budenz, *This Is My Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1947); Benjamin Gitlow, *The Whole of Their Lives: Communism in America -- a Personal History and Intimate Portrayal of Its Leaders* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948); Elizabeth Bentley, *Out of Bondage: The Story of Elizabeth Bentley* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1951); Chambers, *Witness*.

[384] For instance, it appears in journalists Jack Lait's and Lee Mortimer's bestselling exposé of American crime and corruption *U.S.A. Confidential* (1952), as well as journalist Don Whitehead's history of the FBI, *The FBI Story* (1956). See Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, *U.S.A. Confidential* (Crown Publishers: New York, 1952), 2; Whitehead, *The FBI Story: A Report to the People*, 298. 1949 anticommunist film *The Red Menace* (1949) was rereleased in 1950 as *Underground Spy*. See R. G. Springsteen, *The Red Menace* (Republic Pictures, 1949); R. G. Springsteen, *Underground Spy* (Republic Pictures, 1950).

[385] Koestler, 29. Koestler cooperated extensively with United States intelligence officials in the production of *The God That Failed*, a text that would prove extraordinarily influential in the United States. As Frances Stonor Saunders writes, it "was as much a product of intelligence as it was a work of the intelligentsia." US government agencies promoted the book extensively. It is thereby illustrative of American anticommunist attitudes. For an account of the relationship between *The God That Failed* and American intelligence efforts during the Cold War, see Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2001), 60–66.

Koestler's underground embodies all the same traits attributed to the espionage network: it is secret, home to dangerous unknown individuals, and illegal. However, it is more than an espionage network: he describes it as an alternative social world completely indecipherable for the un-initiated. It is an abstract realm that exists as the inverse of a "normal" world. It is not even populated by ordinary individuals, but by "elusive shapes" more akin to deep sea creatures than humans.

Characterizations such as Koestler's point to the ways the idea of the underground functioned ideologically in the 1950s. It mediated a range of anxieties and contradictions within the nation. As historian Richard Hofstrader put it in 1963, the Second Red Scare functioned primarily to "discharge resentments and frustrations, to punish, to satisfy enmities whose roots lay elsewhere than the Communist issue itself."[386] A multitude of recent studies demonstrate how, in the words of historian Landon R. Y. Storrs, American "red scares erupted at various places and moments in defense of class, religious, and racial hierarchies," to which we should also add hierarchies of sexuality and gender, as well as political difference.[387] Anticommunism was a lens through which those with social and political power maintained their dominant positions against perceived encroachments by those in subordinate positions. The trope of the underground must be

[386] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 41.
[387] Landon R. Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 6. For examples of such works, see Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*; M. J. Heale, *McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1965* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*; Tony Perucci, *Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex: Race, Madness, Activism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

situated within this context. Within anticommunist discourse, it was a means of spatially locating dissent and deviancy, and from there constructing "normal" and "deviant" Americans.

Again, Koestler's characterization gestures towards how we should understand these "deviants," and who inhabited the underground. When describing the "strange world" of the underground, he avoids concretely describing its inhabitants. For him, Communists remain "fleeting, elusive shapes" rather than politicized or militant individuals, as if any number of traits could be collapsed into these "shapes," an implication that accords with scholarly understandings of the figure of the domestic communist, that figure who inhabited the underground. As literary critic Roland Végső argues, the "domestic communist" embodied a variety of "different and contradictory traits."[388] It was an overdetermined and polyvalent figure, alternately imagined as sexually deviant, especially as queer, as non-white, as mad or neurotic, and as a member of organized crime. That is not to say the domestic communist always embodied all of those, but that they were in the range of traits that could be collapsed into the figure, and that it in turn came to signify. Consequently, the various practices and identities ascribed to the domestic communist came to define the social milieu of the underground. It is worth briefly cataloguing this milieu, as it demonstrates what anticommunists imagined happening in the underground.

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[388] Roland Végső, *The Naked Communist: Cold War Modernism and the Politics of Popular Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 58, 61.

The communist underground was a space in which a range of sexual practices and identities flourished in a direct affront to traditional models of heterosexuality. As historian Elaine Tyler May has argued, the logic of containment structured American attitudes about sexuality and marriage: "sexual containment" worked to produce a very specific sexual surface world reliant on patriarchal ideologies of gender and the family.[389] The separate communist world below it possessed its own deviant sexual morality. Popular stereotypes about Communists held that they were oversexed and promiscuous, especially female party members, who presumably seduced young American men into communism with the promise of sex, wielding it as a "secret weapon."[390] Some believed that male Party officials had "special sexual privileges," meaning free sexual access to female party members who dutifully volunteered in the name of the Party.[391] As anticommunist writers David Loth and Morris Ernst, the latter being one of the founders of the American Civil Liberties Union and its general counsel in the 1950s, wrote "It was extensively reported and often believed that life in the Communist Party was one long sexual orgy."[392] Hoover argued that Communists actively abetted "sexual immorality" via its underground network, claiming that men and women within it used their new

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[389] May, *Homeward Bound*, 80–118.

[390] Lait and Mortimer, *U.S.A. Confidential*, 52. The communist femme fatale, for example, was a staple of anticommunist films of the postwar era. As Nora Sayre put it, "Bad blondes…often seduce young 'impressionable' men into joining the Party." See Nora Sayre, *Running Times: Films of the Cold War* (New York: Dial, 1982), 81. See, for instance, *The Woman on Pier 13* (originally titled *I Married a Communist*, 1950), a film Howard Hughes offered to various directors at RKO as a test of their patriotism. A sexually aggressive blonde lures the film's central character, a shipping executive with a Communist past, back into the Communist fold. On the film, See Wheeler W. Dixon, *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 82.

[391] Gabriel A. Almond, *The Appeals of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 153.

[392] Morris L. Ernst and David Loth, *Report on the American Communist* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1952), 162–63.

identities to freely engage in adultery.[393] The communist underground was the imagined space where such activities were permissible and encouraged.

Queerness also flourished in the underground. As historian David K. Johnson demonstrates, anticommunist ideology often relied upon and worked through homophobia. American culture has long relegated queerness to the underground, but the shared underground-ness of communism and queerness took on new valences within the Cold War.[394] Anticommunists argued that homosexuals were prone to communist manipulation, prompting many to view them as a national security risk that needed to be methodically removed.[395] Often times, Communists were portrayed as "weak-willed pleasure seeking homosexuals" who were "slaves to their perverted desires."[396] Some argued that homosexuality was a weapon within the Communist arsenal. For instance, Lait and Mortimer claimed, "Communism actively promotes and supports sex deviation to sap the strength of the new generation and make the birth of another problematical."[397] Schlesinger equated underground communist modes of communication with those of hidden homosexuals, suggesting that communists and homosexuals inhabited the same

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393 Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Study of Communism in America and How to Fight It*, 288.
394 On the history of queerness and the underground, see Scott Herring, *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
395 Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, 9. See also John D'Emilio, "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America," in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57–73; Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Duke University Press Books, 1997); Robert J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).
396 John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 49.
397 Lait and Mortimer, *U.S.A. Confidential*, 44.

type of world.[398] There was some overlap between gay activists and the communist movement during this period, as can be seen in the history of the Mattachine Society, a homophile organization whose leader was a CP member.[399] Such moments of intersection fueled anticommunist fears. Like communists, gay men and women were not readily identifiable, and as such were a threat that was simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, a congruence that, as historian John D'Emilio notes, "made the scapegoating of gay men and women a simple matter."[400] Given the degree the Cold War imaginary constructed the communist as queer, any separations between the queer world and the communist world faded away into shared underground existence.

At the same time, the communist underground was mad, neurotic, or psychotic, all psychological concepts frequently deployed throughout the 1950s to describe non-normative behaviors and practices.[401] Writers of the era often saw interest in Communist ideas as evidence of psychological illness or distress.[402] Popular psychologist Robert

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[398] Schlesinger writes, "A curious freemasonry exists among underground workers and sympathizers. They can identify each other (and be identified by their enemies) on casual meeting by the use of certain phrase, the names of certain friends, by certain enthusiasms and certain silences. It is reminiscent of nothing so much as the famous scene in Proust where the Baron de Charlus and the tailor Jupien recognize their common corruption." That corruption was queerness. See Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, 127. On Schlesinger's homophobia, see Corber, *In the Name of National Security*, 19–20.

[399] Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 231–66. For more on the overlap between Communist groups and homosexual communities, see Ibid., 151–87; Aaron Lecklider, "Coming to Terms: Homosexuality and the Left in American Culture," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, no. 1 (2012): 179–95.

[400] D'Emilio, "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America," 64.

[401] On the ideological deployments of neuroses, see Chapter One. On the ideological deployments of psychopathy, see Robert Genter, "'We All Go a Little Mad Sometimes': Alfred Hitchcock, American Psychoanalysis, and the Construction of the Cold War Psychopath," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40, no. 2 (2010): 133–62.

[402] Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, 145.

Lindner, for instance, described one patient's Party membership as a neurosis.[403] A 1954 scholarly study of the appeals of communism claimed the CP was a refuge for maladjusted, alienated, and "neurotic" individuals.[404] As historian Robert Genter recounts, ex-communists like Chambers and Hiss were often described as psychologically abnormal.[405] Popular literature reinforced such ideas. The work of dedicated anticommunist author Mickey Spillane, for instance, often characterized communists as psychopaths, a newly popular psychological clinical category. The character of Oscar Dreamer, the villain of Spillane's *One Lonely Night* (1951) exemplifies this: hero Mike Hammer tells him shortly before killing him, "You were a Commie, Oscar, because you were batty. It was the only philosophy that would appeal to your crazy mind."[406] Such characterizations position the Communist Party as a milieu premised on a distorted senses of psychological normality. The underground was the space in which this occurred, one that encouraged fanaticism, irrationality, and madness.[407]

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[403] Robert Mitchell Lindner, *The Fifty-Minute Hour: A Collection of True Psychoanalytic Tales* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1955), 109.
[404] Almond, *The Appeals of Communism*, 205–6, 236.
[405] Genter, "'We All Go a Little Mad Sometimes': Alfred Hitchcock, American Psychoanalysis, and the Construction of the Cold War Psychopath"," 143.
[406] Quoted in Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 36. For an analysis of Spillane's anticommunism, see Ibid., 34–37. On the relationship between psychopathy and Cold War culture, see Perucci, *Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex*, 26–30.
[407] Hoover argued that "The underground, perhaps more than any other phase of Party activity, brings out the fanaticism of communist discipline." See Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Study of Communism in America and How to Fight It*, 286. Schrecker notes that such language was common within anticommunist literature. See Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, 145.

Racism and anticommunism relied upon one another, producing the underground in kind.[408] Anticommunist writers frequently argued that African American demands for civil rights were the result of Communist manipulation and agitation, that the Party exploited black political grievances and activism for their own purposes.[409] Such ideas animated popular culture. For instance, *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951) depicts racist Communists interested only in fomenting and exploiting racial tensions.[410] The prominence of such arguments meant that black activists were subject to the charge that they were working for Communists.[411] In this framework, civil rights groups were mere "fronts" for communist subversion. As Tony Perucci puts it, "advocacy for racial equality came to be deemed 'proof positive' for some that one was a Communist."[412] Perucci argues that black artistic and political performances disrupted the carefully racially ordered world containment sought to construct, and as such faced repression. For instance, Paul Robeson, who was a communist though not a Party member, faced severe public reprisals after he publically critiqued American racism, an act that brought his

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[408] See Perucci, *Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex*. This connection has a long history. As Perucci writes, "The process of conflating black political activism and Communism was, in fact, a founding practice of Hoover's FBI." See Ibid., 183. On his particular history, see Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *"Seeing Red": Federal Campaigns against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Indiana University Press, 1999).

[409] Spolansky, *The Communist Trail in America*, 198–209; Ernst and Loth, *Report on the American Communist*, 142–61; Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Study of Communism in America and How to Fight It*, 243–52.

[410] Gordon Douglas, *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (Warner Brothers, 1951). As Mary L. Dudziak argues, the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement was bound to Cold War foreign policy. See Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[411] See Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Yasuhiro Katagiri, *Black Freedom, White Resistance, and Red Menace: Civil Rights and Anticommunism in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

[412] Perucci, *Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex*, 19.

blacklisting and sparked violent riots at two of his performances.[413] The Soviet Union already pointed towards racial inequality as evidence of the US's failure, and the exposure of American white supremacy by black individuals and groups that resisted it was, according to the logic of containment, aiding the invisible enemy's attempts at subversion, thereby situating them in relation to and often within the communist underground.

Finally, the illegality of the communist underground linked it with other less politically inflected modes of criminality, especially organized crime and drug use. In addition to being treated as a criminal organization, the Communist Party, especially its underground component, was often seen as a type of criminal enterprise engaged in extortion, money laundering, and other activities more associated with aggressively capitalist prohibition-era gangsters. As historian Stephen Whitfield notes, this conflation was most apparent in Hollywood film.[414] Take *A Bullet for Joey* (1955) for instance, which tells the story of a police inspector tracking a gangster employed by the Communist Party to kidnap a nuclear scientist.[415] In such films, communists not only engage in criminal behaviors, but associate with and rely upon other types of criminals, such as thieves, murderers, con artists, and illegal drug dealers. Lait and Mortimer's popular *U.S.A. Confidential* (1952) claimed the Soviet Union directly supplied the Italian

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[413] Ibid., 33–61.

[414] Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 133–41.

[415] *A Bullet for Joey*, DVD, directed by Lewis Allen (1955; Beverly Hills, CA: MGM, 2007). Samuel Fuller's *Pick Up on South Street* (1953) features similar overlap between the criminal underworld and communist underground. See *Pick Up On South Street*, DVD, directed by Samuel Fuller (1953; New York: Criterion Collection, 2004)

Mafia with opium, who then sold it in on American city streets.[416] While their text is overtly sensational, others made the same claims. In 1951, New York state attorney general Nathaniel Goldstein claimed that the problem of the "dope evil," facilitated by organized "pushers," contributed to the Communist ploy to "despoil our liberty."[417] Lois Higgins, head of Chicago's Crime Prevention Bureau, argued similarly.[418] For such writers, drug dealing was understood as an underground weapon. Common to all of the examples cited here is a blurring of any distinctions between the criminal underworld and communist underground: they exist together in a shared criminal space.

The various dimensions of the communist underground outlined above foreground the degree to which containment's conceptualization of the underground was broadly inclusive. It was not a space tied to a single mode of criminalization. Rather, it synthesized a broad range of overlapping practices and behaviors previously marked as deviant by dominant American culture. Via the figure of the domestic communist, the logic of containment linked previously existing modes of deviancy and criminality together in a configuration particular to the early Cold War. The figure mediated those "deviations" from the reigning regime of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Ironically, Communist political beliefs seem incidental to the communist underground. The logic of containment could easily relegate an individual to it if they displayed enough traits

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[416] Lait and Mortimer write, "[Communists] not only get fortunes for having supplied the dope in the first place, but it helps them promote civil disorder here." See Lait and Mortimer, *U.S.A. Confidential*, 27–29.
[417] Nathaniel L. Goldstein, "Attorney General Goldstein Calls on Women of America to Join Fight Agaisnt Narcotics Menace Confronting Youth," *Women Lawyers Journal* 37, no. 1 (Winter 1951): 39.
[418] Higgins writes, "our Communist enemies are waging a deadly and tragically successful war against us here at home. Narcotic drugs are some of the weapons they are using with devastating effect." See Lois Higgins, "The Status of Narcotic Addiction in the United States," *The American Biology Teacher* 16, no. 4 (April 1954): 94.

associated with being a Communist. The metaphoric communist underground thereby signified a matrix of deviancy ordered by the logic of containment. It relied upon multiple modes of rendering individuals criminal Others.[419]

The underground came to describe an alternate America, one home to the range of bodies and practices that were not representable within the dominant discourse of nation. Hoover argued as much in 1958, clarifying the spatial boundaries of the underground. He writes,

> The Communist Party, never forget, is a state within a state. It has its own system of "courts," legislative assemblies, schools and press. It enforces its own laws, has its own standards of conduct, and offers its own road to Utopia. The party member may physically reside in the United States, but he "lives" in a communist "world."[420]

Hoover conceives of this "communist world" as a state distinct from the United States. National in scope, it is effectively the American surface inverted, replete with its own social norms and institutions that exist within, but not of, American society. He constructs two nations: one secure, and one committed to upending that security. To enter into the latter was to leave the acceptable space of the nation, and to disaffiliate with all its values and embrace deviancy. This "communist world," however, remains physically within the United States – hence the threat it posed.

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[419] Performance scholar Tony Perucci has made a similar argument, though one that is not attuned to the spatiality of this matrix of deviancy. He argues that "Within Cold War culture, discourses of difference were articulated with those of treason. Madness, Communism, Homosexuality, theatricality, and blackness and their articulation together became key elements in a semiotics of disloyalty," what he ultimately terms the "Cold War Performance Complex." See Perucci, *Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex*, 2.

[420] Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Study of Communism in America and How to Fight It*, vii.

Ironically, anticommunist writers identified a type of freedom within the underground, though they would never describe it in such terms. Fears of it hinged on the way it facilitated the creation of new identities. Hoover described the underground as "a nightmare of deceit, fear, and tension, where one has to tell falsehoods, fabricate a background, adopt a new name, and live in fear of being recognized by old friends or acquaintances."[421] This passage comes immediately after he lists the ways an underground communist might disappear: they might adopt a new name, change their appearance, enter into a new profession, or move to a new location. He seems less concerned with subversion than with the "nightmare" of individuals recreating themselves. He continues, "Think of the problems that would arise. What types of stories must be improvised? What kind of personal possessions might be purchased to keep up the cover?"[422] Hoover marks the remaking of one's identity as a subversive gesture, an idea that appealed to white, typically middle-class, Americans who found the Cold war vision of America alienating.

A HIP UNDERGROUND

Throughout the 1960s, when anticommunists invoked the underground in strictly negative terms, an emerging coterie of white writers based out of New York City and enthralled with the idea of being hip began describing it in positive terms, relishing the various practices and identities ascribed to it. For these writers, the imagined world of so-called deviant sexualities, blackness, drug use, and non-normative psychological states

[421] Ibid., 277.
[422] Ibid., 277–78.

offered new forms of creative and political possibility. [423] In this section, I explore the character and function of the underground in white discourse about hip, arguing that it relied upon and worked within the logic of domestic containment. The hip underground was the imagined communist underground inverted. This claim seems counterintuitive given that "official society" frequently derided white hipsters as communists. For instance, the term "beatnik," a neologism derived from "Beat" and Sputnik," emerged in the late 1950s, linking the hip milieu with the specter of Soviet Communism.[424] At the 1960 Republican National Convention, Herbert Hoover declared that "the Communist Fronts and the Beatniks and the Egg Heads" were jointly opposed to Americanism.[425] Hip and beat writers rejected such connections. As poet and publisher Tuli Kupferberg ironically declared in 1961, "Everyone knows the Beat(nik) is the old Jew-Nigger-Commie-J.D.-bum-Wobbly-Cokie-sex fiend rolled into one."[426] Kupferberg argued the figure of the Beatnik was just another scapegoat for American Cold Warriors, mockingly declaring "The homosexual negro communist beatnik would be perfect!" for its paranoiac witch hunts.[427] Here, I do not suggest that Cold War conservatives were right about

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[423] Literary critic Robert Holton has made a similar argument, suggesting that beat culture, that best represented by Jack Kerouac, sought to inhabit a heterogeneous space in opposition to the homogenous space of mainstream of America. Various excluded populations – African-Americans, Mexicans, homosexuals, and drug addicts – constituted this material space. My claims here build upon those of Holton in that they ground his largely abstract conception of heterogeneity in a particular spatial location: the underground. See Robert Holton, "'The Sordid Hipsters of America': Beat Culture and the Folds of Heterogeneity," in *Reconstructing the Beats*, ed. Jennie Skerl (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 11–26.

[424] Richard Rex, "The Origin of Beatnik," *American Speech* 50, no. 3/4 (Autumn-Winter 1975): 329–31.

[425] Herbert Hoover, "1960 Republican National Convention Address," *C-SPAN.org*, accessed January 9, 2015, http://www.c-span.org/video/?280721-1/1960-republican-national-convention-address.

[426] Tuli Kupferberg, *3000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000 Beatniks or The War Against the Beats* (New York: Birth Press, 1961), 5.

[427] Ibid.

hipsters.[428] As I demonstrate in the following section, they rejected communism. Rather, they shared the same ideological assumptions about deviancy. Hipster opposition to Cold War culture took the shape of the object it claimed to resist.

This marks an extension of scholarly studies of postwar hipness, hipsters, and the Beats. Scholars variously characterize it as a distinct style, as an ideology, or as a subculture, but, as I suggest in my introduction to this chapter, Ford's recent characterization of it as a negative "stance" towards the dominant culture offers the most compelling account, one that encompasses the aforementioned approaches.[429] Such an orientation was less of a movement and more of a sensibility or overarching aesthetic that "might have colored or informed a political, philosophical, spiritual, or aesthetic movement, but it could not be limited to any them."[430] It originated within black urban cultures of resistance, and held that the world was fundamentally unfree, a rigged and bankrupt "game," but one could "hustle" it against if they knew the "score."[431] That is, if they knew the rules of the game, they could subvert them, an impulse animating new cultural forms and styles. Such a conception of the world made sense within the context

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[428] Ford suggests that the hipster-communist conflation emerged due to American cultures initial inability to grapple with the specificity of the hipster, its lack of a language to describe its "stance" and the style that emerged out of it. However, as suggested by Hoover's 1960s invocation of the relationship, the identification of the hipster with the communist persisted long after the figure entered American cultural discourse. See Ford, *Dig*, 58.

[429] The scholarly literature on postwar ideas of hip is extensive. Ford's recently published *Dig: Sound and Music in Hip Culture* (2013) is perhaps the most significant scholarly study of the subject, and while I am critical of parts of his argument, his work has been extraordinarily influential on my thinking here. See Ford, *Dig*. Other significant works include Ross, *No Respect*, 65–101; Lewis MacAdams, *Birth of the Cool: Beat, Bebop, and the American Avant-Garde* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 29–96; Michael Szalay, *Hip Figures: A Literary History of the Democratic Party* (Stanford University Press, 2012); John Leland, *Hip: The History* (New York: Ecco, 2004).

[430] Ford, *Dig*, 57.

[431] Ibid., 52–57.

of white supremacist America, but white Americans critical of the Cold War American society began appropriating this world view as their own. As LeRoi Jones put it, white jazz fans extrapolated a "general alienation" based upon the specific alienation experienced by black jazz musicians.[432] For white hipsters, all in America were alienated and the rigged system drove that alienation: the individual was forever at odds with the society they existed within.

I hope to extend this framework. Norman Mailer's "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster" is often considered the apotheosis of white conceptualizations of hip, the best known in what was effectively a postwar genre in and of itself. It remains a touchstone for scholarly critiques of hip.[433] As Ford writes, "the literature of the White Negro sets up an unspoken and treacherous syllogism: if blacks are hip and hipness is criminal, then blacks must be criminal."[434] The multiple modes of criminality associated with the underground complicate the second premise of this syllogism. It is my contention that white hipsters fetishized the range of alleged deviancies containment culture situated within the underground. My intention is not to downplay or minimize the appropriation of black styles and cultural forms by white hipsters, but to engage in a more intersectional analysis of the white hip imagination, which was specifically tied to the underground in a way that black hip was not in the 1950s and early 1960s.

The link between the underground and hipness did not appear until outsiders to the hip milieu, largely white, became interested in it. The figure of the hipster first

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[432] LeRoi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: William and Morrow, 1963), 219.
[433] For more on Mailer, see the following section.
[434] Ford, *Dig*, 54.

appeared in the black press in the 1930s, and entered into black popular culture in the 1940s. Instrumental here was Dan Burley, a reporter and editor associated with black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* and *New York Amsterdam News*. He conceived of the hipster as the archetypal social operator who eyed the "game" with suspicion.[435] Much of Burley's writing on the hipster appeared in "Back Door Stuff," a weekly column in the *New York Amsterdam News* dedicated to providing the "true lowdown" on Harlem street life.[436] Over the column's nearly two decade run, he used terms like "hipster" or "hip" frequently, but never used the term "underground," despite focusing on practices linked with traditional understandings of subterranea as a criminal space.[437] A similar phenomenon occurs in hip dictionaries of late 1930s and 1940s. "Underground" does not appear as an entry in Cab Calloway's *The New Cab Calloway's Cat-ologue* (1938), Burley's own *Dan Burley's Original Handbook of Harlem Jive* (1944), or Lou Shelly's *Hepcat's Jive Talk Dictionary* (1945).[438] Such columns and books helped introduce hip argot to white writers. Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe singled out Burley's writings

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[435] On Burley's conception of the hipster, see Ibid., 48–52. On Burley's writing generally see Kimberly Stanley, "Dan Burley," in *Writers of the Black Chicago Renaissance*, ed. Steven C. Tracy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 141–49.

[436] Dan Burley, "Backdoor Stuff: In Which We Introduce the 'Back Door Man' to Harlem," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 11, 1937.

[437] Arguably, every weekly column in "Back Door Stuff" was about hip in some form or another. For illustrative examples, see Dan Burley, "Backdoor Stuff: In Which Back Door Man Opens His Class In Applied Jive Geography and Economics," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 29, 1939, 20; Dan Burley, "Dan Burley's Back Door Stuff: In Which Joe Q. Hip Busts His Best," *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, June 7, 1941, 13; Dan Burley, "Dan Burley's Back Door Stuff: Those Who Are Truly Hip Will Dig This Spiel," *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, January 16, 1943, 11; Dan Burley, "Dan Burley's Back Door Stuff: In Which a Hipcat Is Studied by Experts," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 24, 1943, 11; Dan Burley, "Dan Burley's Back Door Stuff: Truly, Old Man, How Hip Art Thou?," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 2, 1946, 23.

[438] Cab Calloway, *The New Cab Calloway's Cat-ologue*, 1938; Dan Burley, *Dan Burley's Original Handbook of Harlem Jive* (New York, 1944); Lou Shelly, ed., *Hepcats Jive Talk Dictionary* (Derby, CT: T.W.O. Charles Company, 1945).

as central to their understanding of hip's vernacular in Mezzrow's memoir, *Really the Blues* (1946). Mezzrow was a musician and drug dealer who notoriously claimed to be black in essence, if not in appearance, a "voluntary negro" as he put it.[439] His literary performance of blackness relies upon the vocabularies established by Burley and others, and does not include any invocation of the underground.

The above referenced texts were by insiders, by figures tightly associated with the hip milieu. When individuals unaffiliated with the hip milieu became interested, the language and imagery of the underground entered into the equation. This is first apparent in Anatole Broyard's frequently cited 1948 profile of the hipster in *Partisan Review*, "A Portrait of the Hipster."[440] The essay was his attempt at defining the figure that was becoming an increasingly visible presence on New York City streets, and was the first instance of hip being described in relation to the underground. Broyard conceived of the opposition between the hipster and the society he inhabited in spatial terms, as a dichotomy between "somewhereness" and "nowhereness." His treatise begins with the declaration that "the hipster was really *nowhere*," but "longed, from the very beginning, to be *somewhere*," with "nowhere" referring to the whole of the alienating society he (and Broyard's hipster was always a "he") inhabited and "somewhere" to the imagined authentic alternative.[441] The journey from nowhere to somewhere was a "quest for self-definition," a re-creation of one's identity underwritten by "a philosophy of

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[439] As Ford nicely puts it, *Really the Blues* was the "coming-out party for the White Negro". See Ford, *Dig*, 52. For an analysis of Mezzrow's relationship to race, see Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S.: Literature and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 53–81.
[440] Anatole Broyard, "A Portrait of the Hipster," *Partisan Review* 15, no. 6 (1948): 721–27.
[441] Emphasis in source. Ibid., 721.

somewhereness called jive" that sought to "re-edit the world with new definitions" such that it made sense in hip terms.[442] This was a process marked by a journey through irony, sex, gambling, drug use, and "jive music" (jazz).[443] Broyard ties such activities to what he describes as the hipster's underground existence. After describing his archetypal hipster's stylistic affectations, he writes, "he always wore dark glasses, because normal light offended his eyes. He was an underground man, requiring special adjustment to ordinary conditions; he was a lucifugous creature of the darkness, where sex, gambling, crime, and other bold acts of consequence occurred."[444] This passage appears early in the essay, just before he details two of the hipsters key interests, marijuana and jazz. It is as if the hipster's style marked him as belonging to such a criminal and inhuman world, and that his imagined location there facilitated his interest in drugs and bop. Broyard references the underground again in the closing moments of the essay, just after describing what he understands as the hipster's inevitable incorporation within the alienating structures of American society: "The hipster—once an unregenerate individualist, an underground poet, a guerilla—had become a pretentious poet laureate. His old subversiveness, his ferocity, was now manifestly rhetorical as to be obviously harmless. He was bought and placed in a zoo. He was *somewhere* at last."[445] The hipster fails to stay underground, that space that facilitated his subversive individuality. Between

[442] Ibid., 722–23.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid., 723.
[445] Ibid., 727.

nowhere and somewhere was the underground. It was the space in which his self-fashioning occurred, where he had access to "jive," as Broyard would have it.

Broyard's invocations of the underground are significant for two reasons. First, as demonstrated in my previous chapter, the idea of the entering into and embracing the underground was taking on new ideological valences in the years after World War II. Though his conception of the underground here is relatively undeveloped and he never clearly defines the contours of the space he suggests the hipster inhabits, his formulation is indebted to conventional understandings of the underground as a criminal realm. His invocations of individuality recall Dostoevskian ideas about rebellion that appeared in the pages of *Partisan Review*.[446] Broyard's underground, in that sense, is a space of existentialist freedom, where one acts in accordance with one's self (as Sartre would have it). It is clearly racialized: his image of the hipster is thoroughly entwined with forms of black popular culture, though he never makes such a connection explicit nor identifies the race of the figures he is describing, perhaps a reflection of Broyard's ambiguous relationship to his own mixed-racial background.[447] Second, as demonstrated in this chapter's previous section, the idea of the underground was taking on new meanings in the context of the burgeoning Cold War. Broyard's article appeared just as the idea of the

[446] See previous chapter for more on the reception of Fyodor Dosoevsky among the New York Intellectuals in the postwar era.

[447] As Lawrence Patrick Jackson argues, Broyard deployed the figure of the hipster as a synecdoche for black urban men. See Lawrence Patrick Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). Broyard was a creole of mixed race born in Louisiana. He passed as white for most of his life, and consistently distanced himself from African American racial identity. For an account of Broyard's relationship to race, see Ibid., 291–97; Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Passing of Anatole Broyard," in *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man* (New York: Random House, 1997), 180–214.

underground was coming to be associated with communist infiltration and generalized subversion, a project *Partisan Review* contributed to via its developing anticommunism. Broyard's description of the underground makes this connection concrete: darkness defines his hip underground in the same way it defines Koestler's communist underground.

The hip underground Broyard imagines stands at the nexus of these two developing senses of the underground. It is a transitional work that mediates two different affirmative takes on the underground as a space of freedom and agency. It removes the hipster from the nation, marking the aboveground as a space of alienation. Broyard's underground is its antithesis, a space of agency and creative self-fashioning, one facilitated by its criminality. As many have pointed out, white hipsters fetishized that which was criminal, which meant they fetishized dominant stereotypes and fantasies about blackness.[448] In a sense, Broyard's invocation of the underground within the pages of the *Partisan* Review foregrounds this. The black hipster did not claim to be underground for he was already there within the logic of white supremacist America. Institutions of power had to locate him there. In invoking the underground in the pages of a periodical increasingly aligned with the state, Broyard, who consistently distanced himself from blackness, renders black hipsters as resolutely Other, affirming the ideologies of white supremacy the Cold War shored up. Broyard, however, does not address the other modes of criminality associated with the underground in Cold War culture, highlighting the transitional nature of his work: his underground is not queer or

[448] See Ross, *No Respect*, 65–101; Ford, *Dig*, 151–77.

mad. Chandler Brossard and John Clellon Holmes, two white writers immersed in Broyard's milieu, conceptualized hip undergrounds that functioned as Broyard's but feature the full range of criminalized practices and identities Cold War Culture positioned there.

Brossard's *Who Walk in Darkness* (1952) is one of the many texts vying for the title of first "beat novel."[449] A friend of Broyard, he was a writer and editor who floated through New York's intellectual community. He was part of an emerging intellectual coterie on the fringes of the *Partisan Review* circle that rejected the New York intellectuals' milieu in favor of hip sensibilities.[450] As literary critic Michael Szalay points out, the novel is a partial roman á clef of Brossard's Greenwich Ville circle: Broyard appears as Henry Porter, essayist Milton Klonsky as Max Glazer, and novelist William Gaddis as Harry Lees.[451] The episodic novel follows aspiring author Blake Williams and his friends as they frequent jazz clubs, drink heavily, indulge in sexual affairs, and expound upon their literary ambitions. A rewrite of Ernest Hemingway's *The*

[449] Brossard later rejected the "beat" label, and insisted it was an "existential novel. See Chandler Brossard, "Tentative Visits to the Cemetery: Reflections on My Beat Generation," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 7, 24. Literary critic Steven Moore agrees with this assessment, describing it as "American literature's first existential novel….a demonstration of…the existential absurdity of life," akin to Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (42). See Steven Moore, "Chandler Brossard: An Introduction and a Checklist," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 59. Existentialism was certainly a presence within Broyard's intellectual circle, but his and Moore's characterization of the novel in terms of the French Philosophy relies on an overly broad conception of existentialism. As I suggest later in this section, the novel poses questions about existence, but that is not the same as it partaking in the existentialist discourse then most famously associated with Jean-Paul Sartre.

[450] Brossard, "Tentative Visits to the Cemetery: Reflections on My Beat Generation," 24.

[451] Szalay, *Hip Figures: A Literary History of the Democratic Party*, 84.

Sun Also Rises (1926), it is an attempt to map a new generation, replacing the "lost generation" with that of white hip, a subterranean generation.[452]

The novel quickly delineates an underground/aboveground dynamic, with the latter being aggressively white and capitalist, and the former marked in terms of racial and ethnic criminality closely associated with urban spaces of leisure. The first chapter invokes the language of the underground to describe the social milieu of ethnic minorities in New York City. For instance, Porter responds to someone's fetishizing praise of "surly wops" with derision, claiming "they're so far underground they don't need eyes anymore," a characterization that recalls Broyard's "lucifugous" hipster.[453] Italian-Americans occupy an ambiguous space with regards to whiteness throughout the novel, and are seen as threats by characters with uncontested claims to whiteness: Italian-American gang members violently assault the emphatically Anglo-Saxon Harry in the novel's closing pages. Such a characterization extends to all non-white identities within the novel.[454] Characters describe African-Americans and Puerto Ricans as violent threats, as inhabiting a different world, but one they seek to enter for evenings at a time as they visit bars and dance clubs. As one character notes before the group enters an integrated, but primarily black and Puerto Rican, dancehall, "I feel like an outsider."[455] They *are* outsiders: they always travel to such clubs in Harlem from their homes in Greenwich Village, fleeing what Blake describes as the capitalist "rat race" that is the underground's

[452] Ibid., 85.
[453] Chandler Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness* (New York: Lancer Books, 1952), 13.
[454] Szalay argues that the novel is fundamentally organized around the opposition between an Anglo-Saxon nativism and threats to it by ethnic minorities. See Szalay, *Hip Figures: A Literary History of the Democratic Party*, 85.
[455] Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 26.

antithesis.[456] As Szalay argues, the architects of (white) literary hip, resisting their entrenched position within the changing political-economic landscape of postwar America, sought to "forget the social relations that govern their labor, and that their labor governs."[457] As one of Blake's friends laments, "There must be some way for a man to make a living and not be disgusted with himself."[458] Blake never finds one, subsisting on government unemployment checks and the proceeds from gradually selling his library, but his sojourns underground provide moments of respite from the "rat race."

This model of the underground/aboveground is familiar, recalling Broyard's implicitly racialized conception in "A Portrait of a Hipster." It denotes an abstract deviant sphere that stands as an alternative to an alienating dominant culture. However it is significantly elaborated upon via the novel's depiction of Max Glazer, who serves as the novel's quintessential hipster, an operator who moves through the underground with ease and partakes in the range of practices associated with the figure of the "domestic communist" in the anticommunist imagination. The novel's characters sometimes describe him as "hip" or as the "new man," but more often than not, they describe him as an "underground man," as if he is the underground personified.[459] Such a label aligns Max with the racial and ethnic minorities his friends consign to the underground, a world he moves through with ease compared to his compatriots. He has an aura of criminality:

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[456] Brossard, "Tentative Visits to the Cemetery: Reflections on My Beat Generation," 8; Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 156.
[457] Szalay, *Hip Figures: A Literary History of the Democratic Party*, 22. For an account of these processes in *Who Walk in Darkness*, see Ibid., 83–100.
[458] Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 156.
[459] Ibid., 75, 42.

in his first and last appearances in the novel, he seeks a drug dealer.[460] He embraces the seedier side of life, urging others to recognize "that everybody's life is sordid," a recognition that seems to grant him special knowledge.[461] Blake claims he "had been around a great deal and knew a lot of the angles."[462] In this sense, Max remains firmly within the terrain of Broyard's hipster. However, he also engages in non-normative sexual practices, and it is implied that he is interested in queer sexualities, two things Broyard did not address but were tightly bound to the idea of the underground in the 1950s. Max expresses interest in watching Harry have sexual intercourse with a woman he initially hoped to sleep with, something Harry adamantly refuses to engage in.[463] Max later defends homosexuals against his generally homophobic friends, Harry in particular. When another character suggests there is "something wrong with being queer," he demands that they explain why.[464] Harry suggests it is "obnoxious," leading Max to press him on the issue and dismiss Harry from the conversation.[465] Harry attributes such acts directly to Max's subterranean position, telling Blake, "That guy is completely underground."[466] If Max is the embodiment of Brossard's underground, then that

[460] Ibid., 11–12.
[461] Ibid., 203.
[462] Ibid., 40.
[463] Ibid., 129.
[464] Ibid., 153.
[465] Ibid.
[466] Ibid., 129.

underground features the full range of practices and identities Cold War culture relegated there.[467]

As suggested by Broyard's characterization of the hipster, this underground is a space of creative individuality, the opposite of the alienating society characterized by the "rat race." Max embodies a degree of freedom the other characters lack: he does not appear to be bound by social conventions, something they are envious of. As Harry describes him,

> He can do anything and not be bothered by it. For instance, he can call you up and invite you for dinner and when it's over he can feel insulted if you don't pay his check….Most people have preconceived ideas about how to behave….Not Max. He acts any way he feels like acting. Nothing is either good or bad, dignified or undignified. There's no experience he's not capable of having. He is completely mobile.[468]

Harry's characterization singles out Max's ability to invert standards of behavior within the capitalist marketplace, the "rat race": he can maneuver through it, make the most of it, but not pay a dime, always finding way to bends its rules. Therein lays his hip hustle. Much like Richard Wright's underground man Fred Daniels, Max is not bound by dominant social attitudes and behaviors. In that sense, he is a Dostoevskian anti-hero, the sort celebrated by the New York intellectuals in the pages of *Partisan Review*.[469] He has shed the ideological pretensions of the surface, even those regarding morality,

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[467] Brossard's *All Passion* Spent (1954), a pulp novel he claims was written strictly for financial reasons, features a similarly imagined milieu. See Chandler Brossard, *All Passion Spent* (New York: Popular Library, 1954).

[468] Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 42.

[469] Brossard has cited Dostoevsky as a significant influence, claiming that "*Notes from Underground* was a formidable document among" his literary generation, a "spiritual/intellectual guidebook." See Brossard, "Tentative Visits to the Cemetery: Reflections on My Beat Generation," 8. On the relationship between Dostoevsky and the Beat Generation, see Maria Bloshteyn, "Dostoevsky and the Beat Generation," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 28, no. 2–3 (September 2001): 218–43.

discovering new modes of being in the world, one's ultimately rooted in himself as individual: "*he* acts any way *he* feels like."[470] Brossard's underground allows individual agency to exist free of white middle-class restraints.

Max's characterization throughout the novel introduces a dilemma: did he enter the underground, or did dominant culture relegate him there? The novel suggests the former, a stark contrast from the underground life of a figure like Ralph Ellison's titular "Invisible Man." In the concluding section of the novel, Max asks Blake if he wants to be "fixed up" in the underground, implying that he too was "fixed up" at one point.[471] He entered the underground from elsewhere, meaning he had the privilege to not be there in the first place, and he could leave if he wanted. This exchange with Blake is significant. While I have focused on Max thus far, he is not the novel's main character: Blake is. In many ways, Max functions more as myth than as man. He is an object of fascination for Blake and his circle, the model of the type of person they strive, or at least wish to strive, to be. Porter, for instance, fancies himself Max's protégé. They teeter on the edge of the world Max inhabits, unsure, even fearful, of embracing his way of life. Blake does not take Max up on his offer to be "fixed up" in the underground. Harry praises Max's refusal of social norms and rules, but criticizes "hoods" that do the same, telling Blake as they pass a gang they fear might assault them, "you can't do anything with people who don't have any rules."[472] Their agency is dangerous, which suggests that Max's underground is the stuff of white fantasy, a construction from a position of power:

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[470] Emphasis mine, Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 42.
[471] Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 213.
[472] Ibid., 82.

deviant agency, like that possessed that by Max, offers escape once it has been contained as a separate sphere, a knowable deviant space within the logic of Cold War America. In representing that sphere as underground, it can be instrumentalized. The threat of the "hoods" lies in the fact that they resist any containment, disrupting such a fantasy. Such characters never describe themselves as underground – they do not speak at all.

The agency the underground offers is limited in another respect: it is the purview of men. The descriptions of Max as a "new man" and as the "underground man" link his agency with his gender. The general absence of women from the novel reinforces this: few female characters appear more than once. When they do, they exist only insofar as they define the masculine prowess of whatever man has picked them up for the evening. Within Brossard's world, relationships with women appear as barriers to underground life. Throughout the novel, Blake engages in a relationship with Grace, Porter's girlfriend, the only female major character. Though certainly a romantic relationship, the relationship does not become explicitly sexual until the novel's conclusion, after she breaks it off with Porter. Blake's rejection of Max's offer seems to facilitate this choice: he can go underground, or engage in a relationship with Grace. After Grace breaks up with Porter, she says, "He can have absolute mobility now," echoing Harry's characterization of Max, as if to suggest that Porter could now go underground.[473] This implies that underground mobility is impossible within the confines of a heterosexual coupling. Given the frequency with which the main characters have sex, heterosexuality itself does not seem to be the problem. Rather, the continuous presence of a woman does.

[473] Ibid., 218.

Apart from Max, the main characters generally display an ambivalent relationship to the underground. Blake at one point accepts that he is only "partly underground," part of the "Arrow-Collar underground," while Harry expresses confusion as to its seriousness, suggesting that Brossard was critical, at least in part, of this hip underground.[474] After all, he characterized the novel as an "endless dream or nightmare."[475] However, the fearful element of that dream/nightmare is that the realization of individual masculine agency requires entrance to the dangerous and deviant realm of the underground, meaning that Brossard's seemingly critical attitude in the novel towards the underground rests upon various stereotypes about criminality. The novel does not interrogate the assumptions that link blackness, queerness, and drug use together and render them underground. Rather, it asks whether or not it is worth it to enter into such an imagined space: it poses an existential question about human freedom and agency that hinges upon the spatial logic of containment that cast non-conforming individuals and practices as criminal. Later commentary by Brossard reinforces such a view of the novel. In 1987, he tied his early literary creations to his youthful encounters with "the demimonde, the underworld, the outcasts, and so on." He claims, "the people that I was happiest with, whom I grew up with, who taught me everything, who took me

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[474] Ibid., 82. "Arrow-Collar" is a reference to an early twentieth century marketing campaign for shirt collar manufacturer Cluett, Peabody and Company. "Arrow-Collar Man" was the name given to the company's male models. As Carole Turbin has argued, the "Arrow Man" signified the emergence of a new type of American masculinity tied to the emerging consumer culture: the "Arrow-Collar" was mass produced. In this sense, William's identity as a part of the "Arrow-Collar Underground," a label initially bestowed upon him by Glazer, suggests he remains tied to the capitalist "rat race." On the "Arrow-Collar Man," see Carole Turbin, "Fashioning the American Man: The Arrow Collar Man, 1907–1931," *Gender & History* 14, no. 3 (November 2002): 470–91.

[475] Steven Moore, "An Interview with Chandler Brossard," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 50.

in, were those odd people: thieves, homosexuals, the whole schmeer, like an early German movie.[476] Brossard links together various outsiders into a single deviant sphere akin to that contained within the underground of *Who Walk in Darkness*, one he had to enter into, or perhaps be "fixed up" with. Yet, those within this world are not people as much as they are characters in a Fritz Lang film. Going further, he states, "I could go into the metaphor of these people – because they were many-voiced, and many-this and many-that – but I've always felt official society (from childhood on) was death for me—total, utter death."[477] His characterization of these underworld figures is sympathetic, but relies upon a logic that casts them as Other: they offer escape from mainstream society, just as the underground did for the characters in *Who Walk in Darkness*.

A similar phenomenon appears in John Clellon Holmes's *Go* (1952). Appearing the same year as Brossard's novel, it is remarkably similar in its history, formal structure, and thematic concerns. Like *Who Walk in Darkness*, *Go* is a roman á clef, a thinly veiled account of Holmes's introduction to and friendship with now-famous figures of the Beat Generation: Jack Kerouac appears as Gene Pasternak and Allen Ginsberg as David Stofsky. Holmes appears as would-be author Paul Hobbes, an outsider to the hip milieu the aforementioned figures make up, a social circle Hobbes is alternately enthralled with and alarmed by. Though less renowned than his principal subjects, as cultural critic Leerom Medovoi has argued, Holmes was "perhaps the single most passionate beat exponent" in the 1950s and a "principal architect of beat claims upon the collective

[476] Ibid., 43.
[477] Emphasis in source, Ibid.

identity of American youth."[478] Like Brossard, Holmes sought to actively define the scene emerging around white hipsters, penning influential editorials like "This is the Beat Generation" in *New York Times Magazine* and "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation" in *Esquire*.[479] *Go* features the first published use of the phrase "beat generation," but it also situates that generation in the underground, an imagined space that mirrors the deviant realm imagined by anticommunists and facilitates individual agency in a way mainstream society cannot.

Go details Hobbes's attempts to break with what he understands to be an alienating society, one that insists on stasis. The novel's title is an imperative about movement, a description of the qualities that attract Hobbes to the world of Pasternak, Stofsky, and Dennison. Medovoi writes, it serves as a "signifier for the qualities that attract these men to one another as generational compatriots," one that "links youth, activity, physicality, newness, and excitement."[480] It is a recurrent refrain throughout the novel, repeated as a mantra by those on the move themselves and by Hobbes who wishes to move with them. As an emerging member of New York City's disaffected, middle-class intellectual community, Hobbes is not particularly hip. The narrator describes him and his wife Kathryn: "Their friends were mostly intellectual professionals working on newspapers or writing copy somewhere….They were liberal, slightly cynical, and knew

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[478] Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 223.
[479] John Clellon Holmes Holmes, "This Is the Beat Generation," *New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 1952, 10, 19, 20, 22; Holmes, "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation." Both essays are collected in John Clellon Holmes, *Passionate Opinions: The Cultural Essays* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1988).
[480] Medovoi, *Rebels*, 237.

what was going on in the world around them."[481] Men like Pasternak and Stofsky offer something Hobbes finds far more compelling: they embrace immediacy, spontaneity, intensity, and emotion. He says they lack "any caution" and "self-doubt," make "none of the moral or political judgments he thought essential," and reject overly analytical perspectives on society in favor of "feelings" and "sudden reactions."[482] For Hobbes, their lives are unrestricted by social norms, and they live in accordance with alternative political and moral codes. Movement defines them: "They kept *going* all the time, living by night, *rushing* around to 'make contact,' suddenly *disappearing* into jail or on the road only to turn up again and *search* one another out."[483] They have agency in a way that Hobbes does not. As Medovoi suggests, the beat generation is that which "goes," implying that Hobbes and the middle-class world he comes from is static, and thereby out of touch with the very things he finds so compelling about Pasternak and Stofsky.[484]

In representing such characters, *Go* conceptualizes a milieu of white hipsters who act much like those discussed by Broyard in 1948: Holmes's hipsters are individuals moving from "nowhere" to "somewhere," a journey that takes place underground. *Go*'s narrative hinges on Hobbes hesitant journey through this space. Holmes's locates individuals like Pasternak and Stofsky in a different world, one separate and distinct from that of Hobbes:

> It was a world of dingy backstairs 'pads,' Times Square cafeterias, be-bop joints, night long wanderings, meetings on Street corners, hitchhiking, a myriad of 'hip'

[481] John Clellon Holmes, *Go* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1988), 34.
[482] Ibid., 35.
[483] Emphasis mine, Ibid., 36.
[484] Medovoi, *Rebels*, 237.

> bars all over the city, and the streets themselves. It was inhabited by people 'hungup' with drugs and other habits, searching out a new degree of craziness; and connected by the invisible threads of need, petty crimes of long ago, or a strange recognition of affinity….They had a view of life that was underground, mysterious, and they seemed unaware of anything outside the realities of deals, a pad to stay in, 'digging the frantic jazz' and keeping everything going. Hobbes ventured into the outskirts of this world suspiciously, even fearfully, but unable to quell his immediate fascination for he had been among older, less active, and more mental people for too long, and needed something new and exciting."[485]

"Their world" is entirely removed from Hobbes's own and explicitly located in subterranea, a space constituted by and home to the interrelated practices Broyard located in the underground – jazz, jive, and drugs. It is an exciting space pinned to urban locales like bars, but not restricted to them. It is a compelling alternative to the world Hobbes previously inhabited, one now cast as the surface. This idea of the underground recurs throughout the text. Holmes's narrator describes their activities at one point as an "underground mission."[486] Hobbes equates the beat generation with subterranean modes of being in the world: in the midst of writing a letter to a former lover about his new hip coterie, he finds himself unable to "transcribe his feelings of discovery" leading him to write "on and on about 'this beat generation, this underground life!'"[487] Given that Hobbes has to enter into their milieu, and thereby their space, in order to experience this mode of being, it appears that this underground facilitates their movement: it is not just where they "go," but what enables them to "go." The underground facilitates their creative agency.

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[485] Holmes, *Go*, 36.
[486] Ibid., 124.
[487] Ibid., 126.

As the novel progresses, Holmes clarifies and expands the practices and identities constitutive of this underground such that it becomes consistent with the underground of the anticommunist imagination. Early in the novel, it resembles Broyard's, but Holmes's narrator builds upon it, situating petty crimes" and "craziness" alongside black popular culture and drug use. As Hobbes describes his new friends, they sought out "the crazy," and often deployed the word as an affirmative adjective.[488] It is a space of sexual promiscuity: those in the underground disregard monogamy. For instance, Hart Kennedy, a character based on Neal Cassady, frequently boasts of his extra-marital sexual liaisons, marking his rejection of dominant attitudes about marriage. Both Hobbes and his wife have trysts in the course of the novel. Later, the revelation of Stofsky's homosexuality adds sexual practices marked as deviant to the mix.[489] Writing on this milieu in another publication the same year *Go* was published, Holmes affirmed the varied content of the underground as his novel detailed it, linking the "beat generation" with "black markets, bebop, narcotics, sexual promiscuity, hucksterism, and Jean-Paul Sartre."[490] The interrelated nature of such practices is apparent via the character Albert Ancke, *Go*'s own "underground man," based on real life hustler Herbert Huncke.[491] Ancke is the underground embodied, a figure who partakes in the range of possibilities the

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[488] Ibid., 35.

[489] On the novel's representation of homosexuality and Holmes's homophobia, see Medovoi, *Rebels*, 242–43.

[490] John Clellon Holmes, "This Is the Beat Generation," in *Passionate Opinions: The Cultural Essays* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 59.

[491] A thief and drug dealer, Huncke was a legendary figure in beat circles, reportedly the original source for the word "beat," a source for drugs, as well as for knowledge about a range of non-normative sexual practices. On Huncke's life and relationship to New York City's hip milieu, see Herbert Huncke, *Guilty of Everything: The Autobiography of Herbert Huncke* (New York: Paragon House, 1990).

underground offers. As the narrator describes him, he "preferred staying permanently in Manhattan, where he could keep in touch with all the passers, connections, addicts, homosexual prostitutes, petty crooks and musicians who made up the underground of drugs, crime and craziness which he frequented."[492] Ancke's world is the underground as it existed in the anticommunist imagination. In entering into the underground, Hobbes enters into a world in which such things form the basis of an alternative system of values oriented around the range of practices dominant society cast as deviant.

As with Brossard's underground, the agency this broadly deviant world offers is the strict purview of men. As many scholars have demonstrated, beat literature on the whole was rigidly masculinist, a fact certainly true of Holmes's output.[493] The female characters in *Go* are flatly drawn and serve only to complement the novel's male protagonists. As beat author Joyce Johnson describes *Go* in her memoirs, "whereas [Holmes] scrupulously matches each of the male characters in his roman á clef to their originals, the 'girls' are variously 'amalgams of several people'; 'accurate to the young women of the time'; 'a type rather than an individual.' He can't quite remember them – they were anonymous passengers on the big Greyhound bus of experience."[494] If *Go* is his attempt to define the "beat generation" and the imagined space it inhabits, women are either left out or seen as obstacles to that attempt. Holmes originally titled the novel "The Daybreak Boys," a name he found befitting the imagined space he sought to define: "I

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[492] Holmes, *Go*, 237.
[493] For a survey of this phenomenon, see Ronna C. Johnson and Maria Damon, "Recapturing the Skipped Beats," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 1, 1999, http://chronicle.com/article/Recapturing-the-Skipped/6800/.
[494] Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters: A Young Woman's Coming-of-Age in the Beat Orbit of Jack Kerouac* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 79.

felt that it was an appropriate title for a book about a new underground of young people."[495] The universalizing movement between "boys" and "young people" foregrounds the degree to which Holmes could only imagine his underground in masculine terms. As Medovoi demonstrates, the world Hobbes enters into is a homosocial community that heterosexual relationships with women actively disrupt. Hobbes's wife Kathryn resents his attraction to his new friends and the world they have introduced him to. Moreover, her labor actively supports his ability to "go" underground: Hobbes does not work, and is dependent on his wife for financial support. The ability to go underground is thereby parasitic on female labor. [496] Female labor could produce and reproduce that "new underground of young people," but could not be included within it.

As mentioned above, Holmes was a beat booster, enthralled with the world of Kerouac and Ginsberg, a world he helped conceptualize and popularize via his novel. However, the novel's attitude towards it is marked by an ambivalence that highlights the degree to which Holmes's underground was elective, and thereby rested upon Cold War assumptions about deviancy and criminality. In his initial description of that milieu (quoted above), the narrator notes that Hobbes "ventured into the outskirts of this world suspiciously, even fearfully."[497] Ancke's appearance towards the end of the novel foments a series of moments that foreground the dangers his world poses to people like Hobbes. Like Max Glazer, Ancke is a legendary, almost mythological figure among Hobbes's new hip friends: if Hobbes aspires to live like Pasternak and Stofsky, then

[495] Holmes, *Go*, xxi.
[496] Medovoi, *Rebels*, 241–44.
[497] Holmes, *Go*, 36.

Pasternak and Stofsky aspire to live like Ancke. As with the other hip characters, Ancke certainly expresses a complete disregard for dominant social values and norms, or as he puts it, he has shed all pretenses of "ego."[498] However, unlike them, he is not an aspiring poet or writer: he is a drug addict and petty criminal. He does not adopt criminal styles or enter into the criminal world. He engages in crime in order to get another "fix" and survive, something that ultimately leads to Stofsky's arrest after Ancke involves him in a theft that Hobbes unwittingly abetted.[499] Shortly after such events, their friend Bill Agatson (based on well-known Beat figure Bill Cannastra) dies in a subway accident: Agatson, a beat figure par excellence, drunkenly attempts to crawl out of a moving subway train, leading to his death.[500] Such events push Hobbes away from the world he has settled into. The novel's final line of dialogue, spoken by Hobbes to his wife, is "Where is our home?" as if to suggest that they must decide whether or not live in the underground.[501] Such a choice presumes their ability to leave it, an ability the gay fugitive Ancke does not have, meaning his understanding of the underground as a separate sphere rests upon his actual inhabitance of the surface where he has the power to conceptualize others as living subterranean lives. Like Brossard's underground, Holmes's

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[498] Ibid., 243.

[499] This episode is based on actual events. Police arrested Allen Ginsberg and Herbert Huncke after they were caught with stolen goods. See Jonah Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 84–90.

[500] Bill Cannastra was "one of the early wild men of the pre-1950s Beats." Characters based on him appear in Jack Kerouac's *Visions of Cody* and *Book of Dreams*. He is also referenced in Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" and Robert Creeley's "N. Turo Light." He died in a manner similar to that described in *Go.* For a brief account of Cannastra, see Paul Varner, *Historical Dictionary of the Beat Movement* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 46.

[501] Holmes, *Go*, 311.

partakes in and ultimately reproduces the logic of containment that structured dominant attitudes about deviancy.

I have engaged in such a sustained analysis of these early excursions into hip by outsiders, those only just becoming aware of the "hip" scene, to demonstrate the degree to which hip in the white literary imagination depended upon and reproduced a spatial logic characteristic of containment culture from the very beginning. Broyard, Brossard, and Holmes all imagined hip undergrounds constituted by and home to a diverse range of overlapping and at times interlocking practices that anticommunists positioned below the American surface. Brossard and Holmes, and to a lesser extent Broyard, did not reformulate the binary dynamics of Cold War culture as much as invert them, taking what dominant culture said was negative and saying it was positive, claiming the space anticommunists decried as the antithesis of freedom as one of unbridled individual agency. The appropriation of stereotypes of black criminality by white hipsters was just the tip of the iceberg, a metaphor I deploy strategically. As the epigraphs with which I began this chapter suggest, the bottom half of that iceberg was the same in both the anticommunist and white hip imagination.

The spatial imagination Broyard, Brossard, and Holmes described vis-à-vis their symbolic inversion of the Cold War's domestic spatiality was illustrative of a larger trend within hip and beat discourse. The underground they described became that of a specific generation of oppositional writers. Hip writers throughout the 1950s, both well-known and those forgotten today, worked within the underground as it appeared within their writings. Kerouac deployed it in *On the Road*, describing "the sordid generation of

hipsters, a new beat generation" as "rising from the underground," language that directly recalls that of Max in *Who Walk in Darkness*, that underground man who also embraced the "sordid."[502] When Sal Paradise in *On the Road* famously declares that "the mad ones" are the ones for him, he is celebrating those driven underground.[503] Ginsberg's "Howl" might be read as a catalogue of the underground's various inhabitants.[504] The freedom associated with the life of the heroin junkie detailed in novels like Burroughs's *Junkie* (1953) and Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book* (1960) comes from their total immersion in the world of figures like Max and Ancke.[505] Such figures are perhaps the best known example of these early invocations of the hip underground, but it also appears in texts like Warren Miller's *The Cool World* (1958).[506] Miller, a white author who wrote about black life throughout the 1950s, detailed a Harlem milieu, an entire "world" separate from middle-class white society, populated by the range of figures in the imagined communist underground.[507] Its main character, a black gang member and drug dealer named Duke, engages in interracial sex, hangs out with queer prostitutes, tries hustling himself, and ultimately goes insane: all practices fall within a "cool world" beneath the surface of normal life.

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[502] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 54.
[503] Ibid., 5.
[504] Jonah Raskin suggests as much in his analysis of "Howl." See Raskin, *American Scream*, 133.
[505] William S. Burroughs, *Junky* (New York: Grove Press, 2012); Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book* (New York: Grove Press, 1960). On the "coolness" of heroin among hipsters in the postwar era, see Lewis MacAdams, *Birth Of The Cool*, 52–58.
[506] Warren Miller, *The Cool World* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959).
[507] On Miller's tendency towards racial exoticism, see Robert Fikes Jr., "Adventures in Exoticism: The 'Black Life' Novels of White Writers," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 1 (2002): 6–15.

That is to say, by the mid-1950s, beat and hip writers had firmly established the content of their underground. The subterranean realm described by the first wave of white hip and beat writers introduced a distinct spatial framework into the era's radical imagination that became increasingly visible as the language and affectations of hipness entered the dominant cultural landscape. As poet Kenneth Rexroth summarized it in 1957:

> For ten years after the Second War, there was a convergence of interest – the Business Community, military imperialism, political reaction, the hysterical tear and mud drenched guilt of the ex-Stalinist, ex-Trotskyite American intellectuals, the highly organized academic and literary employment agency of the Neoantireconstructionists – what might be called the meliorists of the White Citizens' League, who were out to augment the notorious budgetary deficiency of the barbarously miseducated Southron [sic] male schoolmarm by opening up jobs 'up N'oth.' This ministry of talents formed a dense crust of custom over American cultural life – more of an ice pack. Ultimately the living water underneath got so damn hot the ice pack has begun to melt, rot, break up and drift away into Arctic oblivion. This is all there is to it. For ten years or more, seen from above, all that could be discerned was a kind of scum. By definition, scum, ice packs, crusts are surface phenomenon. It is what is underneath what counts. The living substance has always been there – it has just been hard to see – from above.[508]

Rexroth was an elder statesman of the San Francisco literary scene who helped organize the famous Gallery Six poetry reading that sparked Ginsberg's literary celebrity. He characterizes the oppositional milieu of hipsters and beats in distinctly subterranean terms. He was writing specifically about the literary scene in San Francisco, but the article appeared in *Evergreen Review*, a New York based publication that would go on to publish key avant-garde and countercultural texts as well consolidate ties between

[508] Kenneth Rexroth, "San Francisco Letter," *Evergreen Review* 1, no. 2 (1957): 5.

oppositional communities in New York City and San Francisco.[509] In that sense, his description of the underground described a particular national phenomenon, one that no longer had any claims to obscurity. When MGM adapted Kerouac's *The Subterraneans* (1958) in 1960 hoping to cash-in on the phenomenon, they introduced the titular milieu with a speech by a clichéd beatnik declaring, "We are Subterraneans. We live in cellars, in bars, in dark rooms. We live underground but we are looking for the light!"[510] That is to say, the underground came to be recognized by those aboveground, the very figures writers like Brossard and Holmes sought to escape. As Rexroth wrote in *Evergreen Review*, "Certainly there is nothing underground about it anymore."[511]

UNDERGROUND POLITICS

The degree to which white hipsters embraced the range of practices associated with the figure of the "domestic communist" meant that critics often accused them of being communists, but none of the aforementioned figures clung to that ideology. Broyard, Brossard, and Holmes were heavily critical of the capitalist "rat race," but they were not socialists, Marxists, or Communists by any means. For most white hipsters, politics were a system one needed to circumvent and hustle against. As one self-identified "beat" put it in 1959, "Political solutions? What are they but election tactics, lies, deceptions, trickery, mass manipulation? All parties use the same tricks, so what choice is

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[509] On *Evergreen Review*'s national influence see Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 1–32.
[510] Ranald MacDougall, *The Subterraneans* (Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 1960). For more on the film, see Preston Whaley, *Blows Like a Horn: Beat Writing, Jazz, Style, and Markets in the Transformation of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 102–11.
[511] Rexroth, "San Francisco Letter," 5.

there between them?"[512] That is not to say they were apolitical: they rejected the political frameworks of Cold War America, and sought a way of doing politics that bypassed its binaries. The dive underground was their "third way," a way to reject both American capitalism, as well as prevailing radicalisms, specifically Marxism.

This section explores the underground in more traditionally political terms by delineating its relationship to the American Left, demonstrating how white hipsters forged a distinct oppositional political vision. As the previous section demonstrates, white hipsters embraced the deviant world in liberatory terms. They also valued the deviant as a historical agent, one that functioned akin to the worker in the Communist imagination. This required some conceptual legwork on their part. Given that the subterranean world they celebrated depended upon containment's linking together of various "deviancies" via the figure of the domestic communist, they needed to distinguish their valuation of deviancy from a valuation of Communism itself. White hipsters did that by defining Marxist and Communist ideology as the purview of the aboveground world, and from there ideologically shearing all vestiges of Communism from their vision of the underground, forging a political imaginary with radical impulses, one akin to certain strands of anarchism.

White hip needs to be thought of in relation to the left because they co-existed throughout the early years of the Cold War. Many of the writers discussed thus far emerged out of New York City's Greenwich Village, long a hotbed of artistic and sexual

[512] Quoted in Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians*, Reprint (Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2010), 49.

bohemianism, and various radicalisms, including Communism.[513] Though American Communism was collapsing, it remained a part of New York intellectual life, exerting pressure upon the city's cultural landscape, albeit in mostly negative terms. Critic and later beat-anthologist Seymour Krim described the Village's intellectual community as a mélange of "ex-Trotskyites, ex-anarchists, ex-Stalinists (everybody seemed to be an 'ex' something) mingled with fancy Ph.D.'s and metaphysical poets."[514] Communists remained a visible presence in the city. As folksinger and Village stalwart Dave Van Ronk recounted in his memoirs, during the 1950s Communists frequently gathered in spaces like Washington Square Park: "The Young CP-ers…would be spread out across the park, five-string banjos and nylon-string guitars in hand."[515] To return to the previous chapter, it is worth remembering that Ralph Ellison's narrator in *Invisible Man* (published the same year as both *Who Walk in Darkness* and *Go*) engages with black hipsters and Brotherhood members (CP stand-ins) within the span of only a few pages.

Many of the writers interested in hip in the late 1940s and early 1950s maintained ambivalent connections to the Left as they left it for subterranea. As literary critic Ben Lee argues, the specter of the Old Left and the Popular Front haunted the Beat Generation, a haunting equally applicable to all white hipsters and white writers

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513 As Broyard put it in his memoirs, "The Village was as close in 1946 as it would ever come to Paris in the twenties." See Anatole Broyard, *Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1993), 8. On Greenwich Village's radical and bohemian history, see Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village: The American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002).

514 Seymour Krim, "What's This Cat's Story," in *Views of a Nearsighted Cannoneer* (New York: Excelsior Press Publishers, 1961), 11–12.

515 Dave Van Ronk, *The Mayor of MacDougal Street: A Memoir* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2006), 33.

interested in hip.[516] Carl Solomon, perhaps best known as the dedicatee of "Howl" but also a writer in his own right, detailed his melancholic attachments to the Old Left in "I Was a Communist Youth," which appeared in LeRoi Jones's and Diane di Prima's *The Floating Bear.*[517] Popular Front political culture shaped Ginsberg's youth: his mother was a communist, his father was a socialist, and before embarking on his literary career, Ginsberg planned to become a labor law attorney.[518] Both Jones (writing as Amiri Baraka) and Joyce Johnson detail youthful encounters with the left in their memoirs.[519] These sorts of ties appear outside New York. In Beat journalist and poet Lawrence Lipton's account of Venice Beach's bohemian scene, he relates the histories of Chris Nelson and Tanya Bromberger, two representative local Beats. Both had radical pasts. They were former New York City residents with ties to left wing organizations: Nelson briefly flirted with Popular Front organizations, and Bromberger was a former member of the Communist Party.[520]

Holmes's *Go* stages this relationship in gendered terms. Early in the novel, Hobbes notes a past interest in Marxism, a political commitment spurred by Liza, a woman he met in college described as "a violent Marxist with a quick, destructive tongue

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[516] Ben Lee, "'Howl' and Other Poems: Is There Old Left in These New Beats," *American Literature* 76, no. 2 (June 2004): 367–89. Lee draws upon Carl Solomon's "I Was a Communist Youth," published in 1961 in LeRoi Jones's and Diane di Prima's *The Floating Bear*, as well as Allen Ginsberg's 1950s literary output to suggest that the Old Left was highly influential to the Beat Generation and their milieu.
[517] Carl Solomon, "I Was a Communist Youth," in *The Floating Bear: A Newsletter, Numbers 1-37, 1961-1969*, ed. LeRoi Jones and Diane DiPrima (La Jolla, CA: Laurence McGilvery, 1973), 129.
[518] On Solomon and Ginsberg's relationship to the left, see Lee, "'Howl' and Other Poems: Is There Old Left in These New Beats"; J. Jesse Ramírez, "The Ghosts of Radicalisms Past: Allen Ginsberg's Old Left Nightmares," *Arizona Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 47–71.
[519] See Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of Leroi Jones* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984), 142; Johnson, *Minor Characters: A Young Woman's Coming-of-Age in the Beat Orbit of Jack Kerouac*, 26–32.
[520] See Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians*, 51–69.

and a mental agility that was new to Hobbes in a woman."[521] As the narrator recounts, "During his last year at Columbia, he had been at first an ardent, then reluctant, and finally disillusioned Marxist under Liza's direction."[522] Hobbes's interest in this woman was both romantic and ideological: he loved her and they were "comrades."[523] Liza never appears in the narrative, but Hobbes thinks about her a great deal: he writes her letters, sometime two or three times a week, "filling many pages with opinions of what he was reading, plans for books or poems, and theorizing on political or artistic matters," stopping only after his wife discovers his actions.[524] Liza rarely, if ever, writes back. She is less of a person and more of an outlet for what he describes as a "rootless radicalism" that was "ingrained."[525] His characterization is inaccurate though, as his "radicalism" is clearly tied to the Marxist Liza and the ideas Holmes uses her to signify. Here, Marxism is one the ideological paradigms he defines his new underground life against. Even as he enters into the underground, he maintains a connection to this woman, as if to suggest that a romantic and nostalgic attachment to Marxism persists amongst the new generation of white hipsters.

Nevertheless, Marxism is something Hobbes must reject. Holmes's treatment of Marxism is characteristic of a larger trend in writing on and within the hip underground. From the point of view of white hipsters in the 1950s, the ideologies of the Old Left and Popular Front could not sufficiently explain the current social and political situation, a

[521] Holmes, *Go*, 33.
[522] Ibid., 35.
[523] Ibid., 33.
[524] Ibid., 34.
[525] Ibid., 35.

common attitude amongst former Marxists and liberals at the time. Brossard tackled this issue directly. Early in *Who Walk in Darkness*, he stages a brief encounter between his would-be inhabitants of the underground, a bebop musician, and a group of Stalinists at Washington Square Park in the Village:

> A group of young Stalinists from N.Y.U. gathered around one part of the circle were singing Stalinized American ballads to a guitar. People were sitting all along the edge of the circle. Inside the circle people were sitting on the stone tiers looking around at each other and talking. Then I saw Johnnie Place strolling around, alone. He was a bop musician. He was wearing dark glasses. He saw us and waved and came over.
>
> I introduced him to Grace. "How do you like the music?" I asked, nodding my head in the direction of the young Stalinists.
>
> "They're groovy, aren't they? They've already sung 'Go Down Moses' three times."
>
> Grace laughed.
>
> "They can't seem to make him go," Johnnie went on, seeing Grace laugh.[526]

Blake and Grace view the Stalinist folk singers as hopelessly naïve, or as curiosities left over from another era. Johnnie Place, a representative of the knowing black hipster, has them pegged as square, stuck in a repetitive groove, lacking the mobility of those in the underground. Here, folk music ("Stalinized American ballads") serves as synecdoche for the remnants of Popular Front culture.[527] There were very real divisions between hipsters and folkies. Hipsters' disdain for folkies stemmed, in part, from their attachment to square, anachronistic politics. As novelist and literary critic Ronald Sukenick writes in

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[526] Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 60.

[527] On the relationship between folk music and the left, see Robert S. Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997); Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002). On the postwar life of the Popular Front, see Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 462–72.

his autobiographical history of New York City's underground, Communists were "still going to demonstrations in jackets and ties" and were "hopelessly Victorian and out of touch."[528] Marxists were "square," part of the surface world that one abandoned when going underground.

The apotheosis of the underground's anti-Marxism (and all "isms," for that matter) was Bob Kaufman's 1959 "Abomunist" sequence, a series of pseudo political poems and pronouncements mocking Communism and doctrinaire political doctrines. Kaufman was a San Francisco based black beat poet whose work catalogued the hip world. As literary critic Maria Damon writes, he was thought of as "the hidden master of the beats."[529] He had a leftist history – he was a radical member of the National Maritime Union, and worked with activists in New York and the South during the Popular Front – but he cast such commitments aside when he became a poet in the postwar era.[530] His "Abomunist Sequence" reduces the rigid political commitments associated with American Communism to absurdities, a means of mocking his youthful commitments. His "Abomunist Manifesto" declares, "Abomunists join nothing but their hands or legs, or other same" and "Abomunists reject everything except snowmen."[531] As Damon writes, the poem's fourteen similarly structured descriptive programmatic statements

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528 Sukenick, *Down and In: Life in the Underground*, 22.

529 Quoted in Maria Damon, *The Dark End of the Street: Margins in American Vanguard Poetry* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993), 33. Kaufman is an understudied and often forgotten figure, but as Maria Damon argues, he was a key figure in experimental postwar poetry. On Kaufman, see Ibid., 32–76; Damon, *Postliterary America*, 57–71.

530 On the Popular Front's influence on Kaufman, see James Smethhurst, "'Remembering When Indians Were Red': Bob Kaufman, the Popular Front, and the Black Arts Movement," *Callaloo* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 146–64.

531 Bob Kaufman, "Abomunist Manifesto," in *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* (New York: New Directions, 1965), 77–78.

ironically deconstruct "what Barbara Christian has referred to as 'isms': contrived attempts to regiment thought into systems, 'last words' which claim authority as the only words, and which thus become implicated in such final solutions as the atomic bomb."[532]

The hip underground's rejection of communism should also be read as a rejection of proletarianism, of any substantive commitment to the working class as a significant historical agent, the cornerstone of Marxist politics, especially as interpreted by the Old Left. This was a common attitude throughout the decade. Even oppositional intellectuals like C. Wright Mills and Herbert Marcuse argued that decade that the working class had effectively allied itself with the American capitalism and the state, ushering in a mass society that internalized the assumptions of Cold War America.[533] According to Sukenick, this attitude was equally prevalent within the underground, which had initiated an "ideological divorce" from the working class.[534] He writes, "The "working class' had not been real since the decline of the working-class movements in the late thirties; the 'masses' were being absorbed in the mass market."[535] The working class is largely absent from the literary texts I have examined thus far. When it does appear, it is threatening. For instance, the ethnic hoods in Brossard's *Who Walk in Darkness* are members of the urban proletariat, a community that existed uneasily alongside the city's bohemians.[536] As demonstrated in the previous section, those figures possessed the wrong type of

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[532] Maria Damon, *Dark End Of The Street: Margins in American Vanguard Poetry* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993), 39.
[533] Jamison and Eyerman, *Seeds of the Sixties*, 36–46, 118–28.
[534] Sukenick, *Down and In: Life in the Underground*, 21.
[535] Ibid., 25.
[536] As Sukenick writes of the novel's characters, "The Italian hoods in the village represent a leitmotif of fear from the classless subterraneans in Brossard's book, alienated as they are from both the Downtown proletariat and the Uptown Bourgeoisie." See Ibid., 21–22.

agency, one that might be wielded violently against the novel's characters. The subterraneans discussed wanted to reject upper and middle class America, but they had no interest in consorting with the working class.

Hipsters' disdain for Marxism, its historical agents, and the cultural forms associated with both cannot be understood except in relation to the crisis of the American left under the political pressures of the Cold War. Their turn away from the left situates their interest in the possibilities of the underground life within the general crisis of the American left and the reshaping of the America radical imagination. The embrace of subterranean ways of being should be considered in relation to the adoption of various surrogate radicalisms in the postwar era: it was one of many alternatives to both capitalism and communism. For instance, as literary historian Jonah Raskin argues, Ginsberg's and Solomon's correspondence in the late 1940s reveal that Solomon took his political cues from Sartre, claiming that "There is no room for an honest man on either side of the iron curtain," and advocated a "third way" between American Cold War capitalism and Soviet communism.[537] For Tuli Kupferberg, both regimes were murderous. In a poem exploring the redemptive possibilities of poetry, he imagines "Comrade Stalin" asking him to "revive/ the bodies of my dead Ukranian [sic] peasants" with his "magic words," while hoping Truman will "recall Korean corpses/ with a haiku."[538] In this context, it is worth considering how Marxism, ideologies of containment, and hip all relied upon specific models of society: the capitalist mode of

[537] Raskin, *American Scream*, 96–97; Quoted in ibid., 97–98.
[538] Tuli Kupferberg, "Untitled," *Yeah*, no. 1 (December 1961): 2.

production, the Cold War American nation-state, and the "rigged system." They also identify specific historical agents: the proletariat, the "American," and the hipster. For a generation of primarily white writers and intellectuals, the social models and historical agents offered by hip proved most persuasive: hip was a compelling social theory in the face of the perceived failure of the other two options. In that sense, it was a "third way."

As cultural historian and critic Scott Saul argues, intellectuals in the late 1950s understood hipsters in such terms: for a brief period, hipness was "radicalism by another name."[539] In publications like *Commentary*, *Partisan Review*, and *Dissent*, writers like Isaac Rosenfeld, James Baldwin, and Norman Mailer explored the political possibilities offered by the figure of the hipster.[540] Mailer's controversial 1957 essay, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster" is perhaps the best known treatment of hip in this manner. Mailer's essay initially appeared in *Dissent*, a democratic socialist journal helmed by literary critic Irving Howe and sociologist Lewis Coser committed to a left, if not radical, alternative to the ideological polarities of the Cold War For Mailer, the hipster was the American existentialist par excellence, a figure capable of making and remaking himself in the face of what Mailer saw as the totalizing (if not totalitarian) impulse of American society, one who offered the highest degree of agency in a conformist world haunted by the atomic bomb and concentration camps. To become a hipster, to live as this American existentialist, white American men (and Mailer's hipster, like that of Broyard, Brossard, and Holmes was always male) needed to "encourage the

[539] Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 60–96.
[540] On Isaac Rosenfeld and James Baldwin's relationship to hip, see Ibid.

psychopath in oneself" by acting as African American men, a claim unapologetically reliant on Cold War stereotypes about black masculinity and sexuality. [541] Mailer's racial primitivism held that black men, always facing violence and marginality, necessarily lived a spontaneous existence of unbridled sexuality to a jazz soundtrack, and hipsters modeled themselves after such figures: "the hipster had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro."[542] For Mailer, the hipster's agency offered a replacement for the radicalisms of old. Hip offered another way. As he put it,

> the Negro holds more of the tail of the expanding elephant of truth than the radical, and if this is so, the radical humanist could do worse than to brood upon the phenomenon [hip]. For if a revolutionary time should come again there would be a crucial difference if someone had already delineated a neo-Marxian calculus aimed at comprehending every circuit and process of society from ukase to kiss as the communications of human energy – a calculus capable of translating the economic relations of man into his psychological relations and then back again, his productive relations thereby embracing his sexual relations as well, until the crises of capitalism in the 20th century would yet be understood as the unconscious adaptations of a society to solve its economic imbalance at the expense of a new mass psychological imbalance.[543]

The above quote appears in the closing moments of his essay, a nostalgic moment in a text that aggressively insists on the importance of spontaneity in the present. In the absence of a Marxism capable of grappling with postwar capitalism, the mode of being Mailer attributes to African American men offers the best alternative. It is a source of comprehensive political, economic, social, and psychological knowledge and the figure

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[541] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," in *Advertisements for Myself* (G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 1959), 339.
[542] Ibid., 341. As Ford summarizes his views, Mailer "suggested black men are criminals, psychopaths, and sex gangsters, and differed from a White Citizens' Council in supposing this to be a good thing." See Ford, *Dig*, 163.
[543] Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," 357–58.

that embodies it can confront, resolve, or transcend the various problems Mailer identifies in American society. For Mailer, the hipster assumed the place the worker once held for Marxism.

Mailer's account generally resonates with the spatial model of hip I laid out in the previous section. Though he never uses the term "underground" in "The White Negro" to describe the imagined terrain of his "white negro," his correspondence reveals he thought of them in such terms. When first pitching the essay to *Dissent* editor Irving Howe, he described the hipster as "a new kind of underground proletariat," a characterization that foregrounds the degree to which Mailer was working through and away from Marxism.[544] His uncritical and stereotypical celebration of black criminality situates him within the same conceptual terrain as Brossard and Holmes: his characterization of African American sexuality and masculinity draws upon the range of stereotypes containment culture situated underground.

Mailer's essay, despite or perhaps because of its wildly problematic racial attitudes, has served as a touchstone for scholarly studies of hip and the modes of agency white hipsters laid claim to, but his model should not be considered the final word on the constitutive elements of the underground nor the models of agency it offered. Mailer himself was not particularly hip, as James Baldwin commented upon in 1957. He was not in the underground. Baldwin writes in "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," his powerful critique of Mailer's essay, "the Negro jazz musicians…who really liked

[544] Quoted in J. Michael Lennon, *Norman Mailer: A Double Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 205.

Norman, did not for an instant consider him hip."[545] While this points to the experiential distance between Mailer and his subject matter, his conceptualization of hip falls short not solely because he was not a hipster. The problem with Mailer's argument is not that he fails to live up to the standards of some ideal hipster, but that he is engaged with a highly specific iteration of hip: he approached a single definition of hip as an outsider.[546] As poet Diane di Prima has written, in the immediate postwar era, the white hip community was small-scale and intensely localized, limited to a handful of people in major urban areas.[547] Mailer was not present during its earliest moments, and was socially and temporally removed from the milieu he tried to speak authoritatively about. He began work on and eventually wrote "The White Negro" while living "uptown," in one of the wealthiest parts of the city, far removed from the Village.[548] He was writing shortly after the white hipster had become a recognizable figure in white America, a consequence of the success of figures like Kerouac and Ginsberg whose texts became synecdoches for the entire hip imagination. As Baldwin notes, such figures were Mailer's conceptual touchstones: Baldwin writes that he was "baffled by the passion with which Norman appeared to be imitating so many people inferior to himself, i.e. Kerouac, and all

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[545] James Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 272.

[546] On the failings of this line of thinking, see Ford, *Dig*, 60–61.

[547] As Diane di Prima writes, "As far as we knew, there was only a small handful of us – perhaps forty or fifty in the city – who knew what we knew: who raced about in Levis and work shirts, made art, smoked dope, dug the new jazz, and spoke a bastardization of the black argot. We surmised that there might be another fifty living in San Francisco, and perhaps a hundred more scattered throughout the country: Chicago, New Orleans, etc., but our isolation was total and impenetrable, and we did not try to communicate with even this small handful of our confreres." See Diane di Prima, *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1988), 126.

[548] Lennon, *Norman Mailer: A Double Life*, 178.

the other Suzuki rhythm boys."[549] For Baldwin, Mailer "felt compelled to carry their *mystique* further than they had, to be more 'hip,' or more 'beat,' to dominate, in fact, their dreaming field."[550] Mailer's theory of hip is that of Kerouac's, whose racial primitivism is well-established. Baldwin suggests that Mailer merely builds upon Kerouac's own conception of hip. In a sense, Mailer is working from a very limited dataset. If Broyard, Brossard, and Holmes wanted to enter the underground to associate with criminals, Mailer approached the underground hoping to associate with white hipsters as they were conceptualized in the writings of recently famous authors like Kerouac.

We should not hold Mailer's essay as an account of hip writ large, but as a manifestation of a broader phenomenon among white writers and intellectuals that sought oppositional political frameworks alternative to Marxism. He identifies one inhabitant of the underground, but as I demonstrate above, that imagined space housed a wide range of imagined threats, deviant practices, and criminal identities. The underground's deviant was broadly defined; it was a polyvalent category within the culture of containment. Early white hipsters wanted to become like underground men, a category that included figures like Mailer's black sexual psychopath, but also white queer drug addicts like Albert Ancke/Herbert Huncke. Such a person positioned outside and below normal

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[549] Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," 277.

[550] Emphasis in source, Ibid. In a supplementary essay to "The White Negro" that appears in *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer provides an etymology and genealogy of "hipster" and "beatnik." His account here begins and ends with white writers, and cites Kerouac and Ginsberg most frequently. See Norman Mailer, "Hipster and Beatnik: A Footnote to 'The White Negro,'" in *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), 372–75. Holmes makes similar comments about Mailer in an interview with John Tytell, noting that he was uninterested in the hip-square dichotomy when he first met him in 1952. See John Tytell, "An Interview with John Clellon Holmes," in *The Beats: A Literary Reference*, ed. Matt Theado (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2003), 409.

society, possessed creative and political power. As Holmes later recounted, "It seems that our attraction to criminality, mostly crimes without a victim like drugs, fit in with our feeling that the definition of man's nature was inadequate. And we were interested in excessive experiences, in the extreme, because a man who puts himself outside the law is a man who is putting himself into himself."[551] The underground, exterior to society in the same way the criminal was, was the space of those "excessive experiences" and the criminal was the agent who enacted them: one had to be a criminal in order to "go" within that criminal space. Mailer's essay identified one type of criminal with such power, but if the underground signified a range of criminal practices and identities, others could act within and against society in ways Cold War Americanism and Marxism did not permit.

Brossard's *Who Walk in Darkness* addressed this, featuring a scene that stages the decline of Marxist political authority in favor of others that white hipsters associated with those relegated to the underground. Late in the novel, a block away from Washington Square Park, that space Van Ronk singled out as a locus of postwar Communist proselytizing, Blake encounters a group of Communists being harangued by a woman only identified as a drunk lesbian:

> Members of the local Sacco-Vanzetti branch of the Communist party were giving speeches, one man standing on a stepladder platform where an American flag was hanging. He was talking about our government's relations with the Soviet Union. Then some boys starting booing him and as they were boing him a woman started shouting from near the stepladder.

[551] Tytell, "An Interview with John Clellon Holmes," 409.

> "Get down off that platform you Communist son of a bitch," she yelled, and walked out of the crowd and to the stepladder. It was a lesbian and she was drunk. She swore at the speaker and the boys clapped and egged her on.
>
> "You dirty lying yellow bastard. Get down off that platform. Get away from the American Flag. We don't want bastards like you in this country," she shouted.[552]

This passage symbolically compresses multiple iterations of American Communism: the reference to Sacco and Vanzetti invokes the Old Left of the 1920s and 1930s; the presence of American flags invokes Popular Front Americanism of the 1940s; and the lesbian's anticommunism invokes the Cold War. The Communists here stand-in for thirty years of American communist history, precisely that which occurred during the lifetimes of the earliest white hipsters.[553] Again, the Communists are not "with it": they are figures of public derision. The lesbian, an underground figure within the Cold War imaginary, assumes a position of authority, literally taking the Communists' place, as if to depose them within the Village:

> The les started up the stepladder of the platform. One of the boys went to the platform and laughing back at his friends took the American flag from the platform and shoved it into the hands of the woman Communist. She kept it in her hand and spoke to her friend and they seemed to be arguing now. There were no police around to protect this meeting. I was quite drunk now and felt unreal about what was going on in front of me.
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> "Get away from here, you crumby bastard," the les shouted, now on the platform with the speakers who had given up his speech. The les started swearing and shouting about the Communists and taking her clothes off to humiliate the man.[554]

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[552] Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 186–87.

[553] All of the hip figures examined thus far in this chapter – Anatole Broyard, John Clellon Holmes, Chandler Brossard, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Tuli Kupferberg, and Bob Kaufman – were all born in the 1920s.

[554] Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 187.

Eventually, the Communists leave and the lesbian remains, staying atop the platform half-naked while detailing the ways Communists "want to make everyone slaves."[555] The lesbian does not advocate an alternative to communist ideology. She only criticizes it, suggesting that Brossard was more interested in deposing Communism than replacing it. Her criticisms, however, are popular: they win over the crowd and her speech trumps that of the Communists, marking them and the history they represent as irrelevant. Her homosexuality links her with Max Glazer, another figure tied to supposedly deviant sexualities. Like Max, she acts without regard for square standards of public behavior, and rallies her immediate public in doing so. Within the anticommunist imaginary, such actions would be enough to situate her within the underground as a potential subversive. However, her explicit anticommunism distinguishes her from actual communists: she is the "domestic communist" shorn of communism.

It is worth dwelling on the drunken lesbian's refusal to offer any political alternative to the communists she denounces. Subterraneans not only envisioned new historical agents, but different logics of political change. Those in the underground had no interest in engaging in the radically socially transformative projects that Communists envisioned. As David McReynolds, a socialist with hip sensibilities, wrote in a 1959 assessment of the beats, "The revolutionary hope for utopia was shot in the back of the head during the Soviet purge trials."[556] White hipsters did not see themselves as revolutionaries or even reformists. The journey underground was one of escape: in the

[555] Ibid., 188.
[556] David McReynolds, "Hipsters Unleashed," in *The Beats*, ed. Seymour Krim (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, 1960), 205.

narratives Brossard and Holmes tell, the main characters teeter on the edge of brand new worlds; they pointedly *do not* teeter on the edge of social or political movements that seek to change the square world. Key to the ideology of the hip underground was its imagined separation from mainstream society: from the point of view of white hipsters, entering into it meant breaking radically with prevailing norms and social relations, not transforming those of the surface. Holmes later said, "In the wildest hipster...there is no desire to shatter the 'square society' in which he lives, only to elude it."[557] For Lipton, the subterranean was a "disaffiliate" who "has no blueprint for the future. He joins no political parties. He is free to make his own inner-directed decisions."[558] The journey underground was a way to "drop out" of square society, a preface to the hippie slogan a decade later.

While the white hipster's separatist impulse marked a break from the revolutionary politics of groups like the CP, it resonated with other strands of American leftism, specifically anarchism as it existed in the 1940s and 1950s.[559] Historian Andrew Cornell argues that between 1940 and 1954, American anarchism underwent a "paradigm shift" constitutive of four key traits: "the shift of critique from class to 'social domination' writ large, the focus on prefiguring the world one desires to live in, the creation of artistic subcultures in opposition to alienating consumer culture, and…the

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[557] Quoted in James J. Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: Making Postwar Radicalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 66.
[558] Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians*, 149.
[559] For a history of Anarchism in the first half of the twentieth century, see Andrew Cornell, "'For a World Without Oppressors': U.S. Anarchism from the Palmer Raids to the Sixties" (Dissertation, New York University, 2011).

recognition that revolution is neither imminent nor a singular event."[560] The underground's break with Marxism and its proletarianism certainly falls within Cornell's first and fourth traits. Its rejection of politics as a concern for the surface world hew closely to his second: in rejecting the idea of political change as square and seeking only to "elude" society as Holmes put it, subterraneans rejected the notion of changing society in favor of constructing an alternative, one that would prefigure a society to come. The agency facilitated by such an act enabled the emergence of subcultures like the Beat Generation, fulfilling Cornell's third trait. As contemporary anarchist writer Ed D'Angelo has argued, the canonical figures of the Beat Generation had many similarities to the more romantic strands of American anarchist theory: a commitment to individualism; a rejection of not just capitalism, but the state writ large; and an interest in the criminal underworld, those figures anarchists have long argued were as capable of ushering in revolution as the classical proletariat.[561] Underground thinking hewed to such principles. Many of the figures that would become prominent figures in the underground were, at least for a time, explicitly allied with anarchism. For instance, New York-based poets like di Prima, Kupferberg, and Ed Sanders, all figures who usher in the underground of the 1960s, identified themselves as anarchists in the late 1950s.[562] Rexroth was a committed anarchist throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[563]

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[560] Andrew Cornell, "A New Anarchism Emerges, 1940-1954," *The Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 5, no. 1 (2011): 124.

[561] Ed D'Angelo, "Anarchism and the Beats," in *The Philosophy of the Beats*, ed. Sharin N. Elkholy (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 227–42. See also Cornell, "'For a World Without Oppressors:' U.S. Anarchism from the Palmer Raids to the Sixties," 501–88.

[562] See D'Angelo, "Anarchism and the Beats," 235. Ed Sanders, often considered a bridge between the Beat and Hippie generations, dedicated the first issue of his journal, *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, to

This anarchist turn, more in sensibility than in name, foregrounds the degree to which the subterranean turn was spurred by a critique of prevailing radicalisms and ought to be considered in political terms. As explored in the previous chapter, the dive underground generally was a rejoinder to the perceived failings of the Communist Party and Marxism, a response to the crisis of the Left and its institutions. Other radicals similarly embraced anarchism. Dwight Macdonald, C. Wright Mills, and Paul Goodman, for instance, turned towards anarchism during the same period, though their approaches to the philosophy varied widely from that of white hipsters. That, however, is not to say the radical dimensions of underground thinking lived up to the claims of radical exteriority that white hipsters made about themselves and their activity. Their celebration of deviancy and criminality occurred within the frameworks provided by the Cold War, logics they uncritically accepted. If they could be considered radicals, it is only in the broadest sense of the word. Many of the white writers I have discussed thus far romanticized stereotypes crafted by the architects of Cold War America. Even within their work, those underground figures – criminals, queers, African Americans, and the mentally ill – that they celebrated were not actively organizing under the auspices of inhabiting the same imagined space. They viewed "deviancy" from afar.

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anarchism, along with a variety of other political causes. See Ed Sanders, *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, no. 1 (1962). For an in depth study of Sanders, see the following chapter.

563 Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). On Rexroth's anarchism, see Franklin Rosemont, "Rexroth's Chicago, Chicago's Rexroth: Wobblies, Dil Pickler's, and Windy City Dada," *Chicago Review* 52, no. 2/4 (Autumn 2006): 151–63.

SUBTERRANEAN NATION

When Kerouac discussed the underground in *Esquire* magazine, he spoke of an "American underground," linking the subterranean realm conceptualized by early white hipsters to a specific national context, something figures like Broyard, Brossard, and Holmes did not do.[564] They heralded an alternative present within the United States, but did not explicitly suggest that it was bound to the nation in any formal sense. The anticommunists that conceptualized the underground did. The idea itself was structurally bound to a conception of the nation in that it emerged in response to the nation-building work of containment. As recounted in the first section of this chapter, in the late 1950s Hoover viewed it a nation that lived according to its own rules just under the surface of the nation he claimed to protect, present wherever his "America" was. When early white hipsters invoked the underground, they did not see it in such terms. They saw themselves as escaping the nation. If white hipsters understood the underground as prefiguring a new world, it was not clear what specific shape that world would take. Though their encounters with the underground took place in urban pockets of alleged criminality like jazz clubs, their conception of the underground and the society it prefigured was largely abstract, an imagined layer of experience few had access to. Kerouac's invocation of an "American underground" suggests that this changed by the end of the decade.

This section explores how white hipsters understood the underground as prefiguring a new America. If in the anticommunist imagination the underground functioned as a quintessentially un-American space, by the latter half of the decade, when

[564] Kerouac, "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," 24.

notions of hip and beat had achieved some degree of popularity across America, hipsters began seeing it as an alternative nation, one akin to Hoover's underground, but positively defined and irrevocably American in character. In that sense it continued to function within the logic of containment, perhaps even more so than it had just a few years previous, emerging as a just another nation-building project. The nationalist underpinning in hip and beat writing of this moment tempered the radical exteriority white hipsters imagined, lending a reformist shade to their separatism and undercutting the anarchist impulse of such prefigurative politics.

Subterraneans did not reject the nation-state as a principle. Rather, they separated its form from its content, and argued that its practices were the problem. Take Allen Ginsberg's 1956 poem "America" for instance. The poem is a mocking rejection of Cold War America. As he addresses the nation in the fifth line of the poem, "Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb."[565] It features a laundry list of underground practices and themes as they presented within the Cold War imaginary. It includes references to his drug use ("I smoke marijuana every chance I get"), claims to madness ("I'm nearsighted and psychopathic anyway"), his queerness ("America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel"), as well as his melancholic attachment to the pre-war Left ("America I used to be a communist when I was a kid I'm not sorry).[566] However, as literary critic Michael Davidson points out, he expresses his critique of America through the American idioms containment relied upon and sanctioned: the poem's final line, "America I'm putting my

[565] Allen Ginsberg, "America," in *Collected Poems: 1947-1997* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 154.
[566] Ibid., 154, 156, 154.

queer shoulder to the wheel," is as much an endorsement of American can-do individualism as it is a subterranean subversion of it.[567] Such a reading suggests that the ideology of the nation provided the rhetorical frame for his oppositional position. Ginsberg directs his "fuck you" not at the nation wholesale, but at the violent practices suggested by its use of the "atom bomb." Kupferberg wrote similarly in 1961. He argued that the "Beat Movement….rejected the identification of 'American' with capitalism & imperialism, war & A bombs."[568] Kupferberg identifies America's relationship with violent practices and ideologies as the problem, not the nation itself, as if to suggest that alternative practices and ideologies could be identified with it.[569] Within the hip underground, the idea of America as a geopolitical space remained an ordering principle, a space that could be reconstituted via the adoption of subterranean values. Subterraneans hoped to burrow beneath it and plant the seeds for a new kind of nation.

Kerouac's *The Subterraneans* was perhaps the most visible example of this project. A "short, chaotic novel," according to literary historian James Campbell, it is an excellent example of late 1950s Beat "white-negroism," an extended exercise in racial primitivism that characterized Kerouac's take on the underground.[570] Set in San Francisco, it details the relationship between Leo Percepied, Kerouac's stand-in, and a

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[567] Michael Davidson, *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004), 74–75.

[568] Kupferberg, *300000000000000000000000000000000000000000 Beatniks or The War Against the Beats*, 4.

[569] Kupferberg appears in Ginsberg's "Howl" as the figure "who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge…and walked away unknown and forgotten into the ghostly daze of Chinatown soup alleyways & firetrucks." See Allen Ginsberg, "Howl," in *Collected Poems: 1947-1997* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 135.

[570] Campbell, *This Is the Beat Generation: New York-San Francisco-Paris*, 139. See also Jon Panish, "Kerouac's The Subterraneans: A Study of 'Romantic Primitivism,'" *MELUS* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 107–23.

half-black, half-Cherokee woman named Mardou Fox, a stand-in for a woman Kerouac knew and loved in New York City in the mid-1950s named Alene Lee. In *The Subterraneans*, Kerouac links subterranean identity with the possibility of a nation reformed, casting the underground as an alternative America that might prefigure a new nation to come.

Kerouac's subterraneans hew closely to those imagined by writers like Brossard and Holmes in two respects. First, they inhabit the same type of underground. For Leo, a "subterranean" is any member of the "hip or beat generation."[571] The novel is as much an attempt to define this milieu as it is to describe his fraught relationship with Mardou. He defines them on the opening page, "They are hip without being slick, they are intelligent without being corny, they are intellectual as hell and know all about Pound without being pretentious or talking too much about it, they are very quiet, they are very Christlike."[572] They are outside mainstream America, a position affirmed when Leo recalls a peer describing them as "urban Thoreaus."[573] Rather than retreat from American society to nature, they head underground. Mardou is the novella's archetypal subterranean, and engages in the practices associated within the underground in the hip imagination: she spent time in a mental hospital, she is black, takes drugs, and consorts with other underground denizens. Her unnamed sister states, "She smokes dope, she hangs out with

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[571] Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 97.
[572] Ibid., 1. Leo attributes this definition to "Adam Moorad," a stand-in for Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg's personal archivist and assistant Bill S. Morgan suggests that Ginsberg originated the term "subterranean" in the early 1950s to describe the new generation of "intellectual hipsters" that frequented "unpretentious Village bars." See Bill Morgan, *The Typewriter Is Holy: The Complete, Uncensored History of the Beat Generation* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2011), 52.
[573] Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*, 1994, 15.

all those queer guys with beards in the city."[574] As literary critic Penny Vlagopoulus notes, "the subterraneans mix and match codes of gender, race, and class."[575] They embody the range of traits associated with the underground in the Cold War imagination.

Second, like those imagined by Brossard and Holmes, this underground is elective. The pronouns used to describe the subterraneans in the above quoted passages are important: Leo always refers to them as "they" and "them," never "I," "us," or we." Throughout the text, none of the so-called subterraneans refer to themselves as such. Written from Leo's perspective, he never inserts such language into their mouths. This marks him as an outsider like Mailer, a fact he seems painfully aware of. Early on, he notes that they have is a "new bop generation way of speaking" he cannot effectively mimic.[576] He claims they do not like him, nor do they understand why he tries to ingratiate himself within their community: they "always hated me, cast me out, shat on me, from the beginning in 1943."[577] In naming them subterraneans, he positions them as Other: they are underground only insofar as he is not, meaning their world is one he must enter into. Mardou functions as his point of entry. Literary critic Nancy McCampbell Grace writes, "When he begins to date [Mardou], possessing her body and appropriating her 'otherness,' he joins a younger, hipper group, shedding a self that he defines as aging

[574] Ibid., 35.
[575] Vlagopoulus, "Voices from Below: Locating the Underground in Post-World War II American Literature," 78.
[576] Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*, 1994, 7.
[577] Ibid.

and isolated; a dumb 'Canuck' who can barely control the English language, his sexuality, or his huge ego."[578]

Leo's relationship with Mardou marks the point at which Kerouac's conception of the underground diverges from earlier conceptualizations of the hip underground. While Leo loves Mardou, she exists less as an individual and more as a "racial and historical concept" that facilitates his own journey underground.[579] For him, Mardou is both the "essential American" and the "essential subterranean," pointing the way towards a past that might be mobilized in the construction of a new national imaginary. At one point, Leo tells her "Honey what I see in your eyes is a lifetime of affection not only from the Indian in you but because as part Negro somehow you are the first, the essential woman, and therefore the most fully affectionate and maternal" before adding via narration "there now is the chagrin too, some lost American addition and mood with it."[580] Her heritage connects her to an American essence he feels he has no access to except through his relationship to her, which prompted "thoughts about the Negroes and Indians and America in general but with all the overtones of the 'new generation' and other historical

[578] Nancy McCampbell Grace, "A White Man in Love: A Study of Race, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Jack Kerouac's Maggie Cassidy, The Subterraneans and Tristessa," *College Literature* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 52.
[579] Ibid., 52, 54. It is worth noting that throughout the novella, Mardou resists Leo's characterization of her as such: she has agency within the novel, an agonizing fact for Leo and the source of much of his anxiety. She repeatedly asserts that she wishes to be "independent," that Leo does not understand what it means to be black in America, and it is she that ultimately leaves him, choosing another man over him in a demonstration of her own sexual agency.
[580] Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*, 1994, 94.

concerns in which she was now swirled just like all of us in the Wig and Europe Sadness of us all."[581] This "sadness" stems from the history of American settler colonialism:

> I'd been out there and sat down on the ground and seen the rail the steel of America covering the ground filled with the bones of old Indians and Original Americans.—In the cold gray fall in Colorado and Wyoming I'd worked on the land and watched Indian hoboes come suddenly out of brush by the track and move slowly, hawk lipped, rill-jawed and wrinkled, into the great shadow of the light bearing burdenbags and junk talking quietly to one another and so distant from the absorptions of the field hands, even the Negroes of Cheyenne and Denver streets, the Japs, the general minority Armenians and Mexicans of the whole West that to look at a three-or-foursome of Indians crossing a field and a railroad track is to the senses like something unbelievable as a dream.[582]

Mardou the subterranean leads Leo to imagine the victims of the conquest of the American west, those skeletal remains buried beneath the soil that railroad ties now cover. The underground here grants access to repressed narratives. For Leo, to enter into a relationship with Mardou is not only a way to enter into the hip underground she is a part of, but also a way to embrace repressed national histories.

This is a vision of the underground as an oppositional national community. In Leo's attempt to become subterranean, he seeks to transform his relationship to America. Like Ginsberg and Kupferberg, he does this by way of rejecting its imperialist past and present. As Vlagopoulus argues, the history Leo imagines himself accessing via Mardou runs counter to Cold War political goals. [583] It foregrounds the imperialist foundations of the nation at the moment it was actively promoting itself as a bastion of freedom, peace,

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[581] Ibid., 20.
[582] Ibid.
[583] Vlagopoulus writes, "Kerouac suggests that one can dig through the layers of social and political mediation inherent in the popularized subculture of this era [the beats] to uncover an important narrative of displacement, one that he underwrites in order to interrogate the parameters of post-World War II American history." See Vlagopoulus, "Voices from Below: Locating the Underground in Post-World War II American Literature," 69–70.

and liberty. In Leo's mind, their relationship functions as an act of historical absolution. This extends to the entire subterranean milieu: they are, after all, "Christlike," and thus saviors and redeemers.[584] As Leo describes the earliest moments of his relationship with Mardou, "we begin our romance on the deeper level of love and histories of respect and shame.—For the greatest courage is shame and the blurfaces in the passing train see nothing out on the plain but figures of hoboes rolling out of sight."[585] His relationship with Mardou is a means of embracing the national shame of imperialism, thereby diving into that which the US actively repressed and heralding the possibility of a nation reconstituted. Within this framework, a continued relationship with Mardou and the subterranean milieu she associated with amounts to entering into a new national community, one premised upon acknowledging the violent past Cold War culture sought to repress.

Kerouac's vision of the underground as the nation re-imagined pushes against the separatist impulse of earlier white hipsters. His political critique relies upon the assumptions of the national vision he ostensibly opposes. While Mardou's subterranean-ness importantly foregrounds a repressed history, Kerouac's imagination remains structured by racist stereotypes. As Phillip Deloria would have it, the Native Americans described in the passage above are "Indians in unexpected places," only legible as "bones" and not as members of the living and present-day working-class Leo allies

[584] Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*, 1994, 1.
[585] Ibid., 21.

himself with. It is a struggle for him to position them in the present.[586] Plus, his fetishization of Mardou is the precondition for such an imagining. His re-imagined America is built upon stereotypes and assumptions indebted to the colonialist practices he implicitly denounces throughout the novella, foregrounding the affinity between his vision of America and that of figures like Hoover. The America he imagines would be best described as a variant of that which Cold War culture envisioned rather than a break from it. It is an alternative constructed according to different values and one that could potentially grow, Leo's desire to join it suggests as much, but it is not one that challenges the idea of "America" as an organizing principle, which remains an aspirational ideal.

Implicit in the political vision of *The Subterraneans* is the idea that the titular figures constitute new Americans, an impulse clarified via Kerouac's enthusiasm for Robert Frank's *The Americans*. While *The Subterraneans* hoped to recover a disavowed American past, Frank's work, produced during his travels across the United States, represented a disavowed present, that side of America white hipsters imagined as the underground: dive bars and juke joints, black cultural life, queer people, and the sordid spaces of the American landscape. Now canonized as perhaps as the most important work in postwar American photography, at the time of its publication many denounced it in terms reminiscent of those reserved for hipsters. Photography journals like *Aperture* and *Popular Photography* called it "un-American."[587] As intellectual historian George Cotkin

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[586] See Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004). For an excellent in-depth analysis of the novel's depiction of indigenous peoples, see Vlagopoulus, "Voices from Below: Locating the Underground in Post-World War II American Literature," 64–111.

[587] On the reception of *The Americans* at the time of its publication, see Alexander Nesterenko and C. Zoe Smith, "Contemporary Interpretations of Robert Frank's The Americans," *Journalism and Mass*

argues, it possesses a distinctly beat or hip sensibility.[588] Part of this stems from the friendship and collaboration between Kerouac and Frank: Kerouac wrote the introduction to *The Americans*, and they collaborated on several other projects.[589] Commonly understood as an important commentary on postwar America, Frank's should also be considered a critical and self-aware commentary on the construction of above and underground Americans, a corrective to the problematic underground imagined by previous white hipsters. Kerouac's strangely understudied introduction elides Frank's nuance, identifying Frank's "Americans" as Kerouac's "subterraneans."[590] Reading these two texts together thereby further illustrates the relationship between the hip underground and Cold War nation-building projects.

Frank's critical take on the underground stems from the sense of ambivalence that animated *The Americans* from the moment he conceived of it. Frank had an uneasy relationship with the nation he moved to after World War II.[591] For instance, in a 1947 letter to his parents in Sweden, he described America as a "really free country" where a

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Communication Quarterly 61, no. 3 (1984): 567–77. On its canonization, see W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Ends of American Photography: Robert Frank as National Medium," in *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 272–93.

588 George Cotkin, "The Photographer in the Beat-Hipster Idiom: The Robert Frank's The Americans," *American Studies* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 19–33.

589 On the relationship between Frank and Kerouac, see Luc Sante, "Robert Frank and Jack Kerouac," in *Looking In: Robert Frank's The Americans*, Expanded (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2009). Frank was also close to New York's art scene. See Sara Greenough, "Resisting Intelligence: Zurich to New York," in *Looking In: Robert Frank's The Americans*, ed. Sara Greenough (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 2–37.

590 Kerouac's introduction to *The Americans* is one of his understudied texts, which is strange given the volumes written about Kerouac and Frank separately. One notable study of Kerouac's introduction is Caroline Blinder, "'A Kind of Patriotism': Jack Kerouac's Introduction to Robert Frank's Americans (1959)," in *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image*, ed. Rui Manuel G. de Carvalho and Maria de Fátima Lambert (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 235–44. I have not located any works that read this introduction and *The Subterraneans* together.

591 See Greenough, "Resisting Intelligence: Zurich to New York," 3–4.

"person can do what he wants" but noted that "there is only one thing you should not do, criticize anything."[592] Frank hoped to demystify Cold War national visions. In the application for the Guggenheim fellowship that funded the cross-country trip that was the basis for the book, he described his planned project as an attempt to visualize the nation in its totality: "What I have in mind, then, is observation and record of what one naturalized American finds to see in the United States that signifies the kind of civilization born here and spreading elsewhere."[593] His use of the word "civilization" echoes the language of containment which sought to define America as such, but in acknowledging its spread he gestured towards its imperialist impulses. In a list of potential subjects, he conjured images akin to those in Ginsberg's "America": "a town at night, a parking lot, a supermarket, a highway, the man who owns three cars and the man who owns none, the farmer and his children, a new house and a warped cardboard house, the dictation of taste, the dream of grandeur, advertising, neon lights, the faces of the leader and the faces of the followers, gas tanks and post offices and backyards." [594] Such a list speaks to his intentions: he saw his project as "sociological, historical, and aesthetic," as a creative interpretation of the images and sensibilities of America, held as both an idea and a place, as he felt it existed in the 1950s.[595]

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[592] Anne Tucker and Philip Brookman, eds., *Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 14.
[593] Robert Frank, "Application for John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, 1954," in *Looking In: Robert Frank's The Americans* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 362.
[594] Ibid.
[595] Ibid. Greenough summarizes this aspect of his work nicely: "his intention was to describe not simply a physical, geographical, landscape but rather an emotional moral terrain, and not the actual journey of one individual but rather the course, even the destiny, of the nation." See Sara Greenough, "Transforming

The finished work, eighty-seven images Frank selected, ironically captioned, and carefully ordered, is an extended narrative meditation on contrast and contradiction in America. As such, it critically maps the dialectical relationship between the surface and underground that I have argued was central to the Cold War imaginary, implicitly identifying the close connection between such imagined spaces and the idea of Cold War nationhood.[596] Art historian and literary critic W. J. T. Mitchell nicely summarizes it, noting that it reveals "smug, proto-fascist patriarchy in images such as *City-Fathers—Hoboken, New Jersey*, *Political Rally—Chicago*, and *Convention Hall—Chicago*; grimy, urban landscapes in unexpected places like *Butte, Montana*, [and] alienated labor in expected places like *Assembly Line—Detroit*," but revels in a "distinct American sublimity" seen in photographs like "*Candy Store—New York City*, *Café—Beaufort, South Carolina*, and *Bar—Las Vegas , Nevada*."[597] Nowhere in the text does Frank speak of America in terms of above or underground spaces. Nevertheless, *The Americans* visualizes this binary by depicting those individuals, groups, and phenomena America casts to the lower depths of the nation, while at the same time ironically depicting those who positioned them there. As Greenough writes, Frank saw his photographs as "depicting those who observe and those who are observed," producing a work that

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Destiny into Awareness: The Americans," in *Looking In: Robert Frank's The Americans* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 181.

[596] Contrast, contradiction, and dialogism are recurrent motifs in studies of Frank's oeuvre. See Mitchell, "The Ends of American Photography: Robert Frank as National Medium"; Neil Campbell, "'The Look of Hope or the Look of Sadness': Robert Frank's Dialogical Vision,'" *Comparative American Studies* 1, no. 2 (2003). It is now a commonplace within studies of visual culture, photography especially, and postwar American culture that Frank's work amounts to a substantive political critique. For instance, see Neil Campbell, "Cold War 'Containment Culture' and Photography: Robert Frank's The Americans and the 1950s," in *American Visual Cultures*, ed. David Holloway and John Beck (London: Continuum, 2005), 142–49.

[597] Mitchell, "The Ends of American Photography: Robert Frank as National Medium," 278–80.

represents "the contrast between those who are powerless and those who are powerful."[598] Frank's "proto-fascist patriarchs," the political figures in a position to observe, are precisely those that cast Frank's other subjects – such as those working class youth huddled around the recurrent images of juke-boxes, the multiple photographs of African Americans, and the queer youth depicted in *New York City* – into the underground. The title of the book thus ironically inverts the logic of domestic containment that excludes such figures from the nation by insisting on their presence within it.

However, ever unlike many of the white architects of the hip underground, Frank does not accept this binary uncritically: he recognizes it as a deeply problematic means of constructing the nation. This is most evident in his photographs that address racial segregation, namely the oft-referenced and reproduced *Trolley-New Orleans*, which depicts the verticality of the above/underground divide horizontally, with white Americans positioned in the front of the titular trolley and black Americans relegated to the back. Furthermore, he does not ascribe any inherent national-identity, historical significance, or new modes of being to his subjects. As Mitchell suggests, his images are ambiguous: they resist the imposition of meaning (even that which I have just ascribed to them), foregrounding the degree to which the book itself is about the active construction of the identity the title invokes, as if that title came with "scare quotes." Frequently, his subjects look into the camera (sometimes in apparent annoyance as is the case with the African American couple in *San Francisco*) an act of resistance that disrupts the

[598] Greenough, "Transforming Destiny into Awareness: The Americans," 178.

fetishistic gaze typical of the underground milieu Frank consorted with. In that sense, then, *The Americans* can be read as a text about the construction of the aboveground/underground dynamic that domestic containment relied upon, specifically foregrounding the underground as entwined with containment's nation-building project.

Such nuance appears lost in Kerouac's introduction to the work, which celebrates the essential American-ness of Frank's subjects in terms reminiscent of those featured in *The Subterraneans*, selectively casting Frank's Americans as his own subterraneans. Kerouac saw Frank's work as representative of America in its totality. As he puts it, "The humor, the sadness, the EVERYTHING-NESS and American-ness of these pictures!"[599] Much of the introduction consists of Kerouac's own descriptions of Frank's photographs. The passage that follows his proclamation of the pictures' "EVERYTHING-NESS and American-ness" is representative: "Tall thin cowboy rolling butt outside Madison Square Garden New York for rodeo season, sad spindly unbelievable—Long shot of night road arrowing forlorn into immensities and flat of impossible-to-believe America in New Mexico under the prisoner's moon." [600] This passage suggests each referenced image displays said "EVERYTHING-NESS and American-ness," effacing the ambiguity of the images by imposing a strict interpretation upon them. He writes in the following paragraph, "the faces don't editorialize or criticize or say anything but 'This is the way we are in real life and if you don't like it I don't know anything about it 'cause I'm living

[599] Since no page numbers appear in *The Americans*, page number references from Kerouac's introduction will begin counting from that essay's title page. See Jack Kerouac, "Introduction," in *The Americans*, Revised Edition (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2008), 2.
[600] Ibid.

my own life my way and may God bless us all, mebbe'…'if we deserve it'…"[601] Such a statement contradicts his own claim that the images do not "editorialize or criticize": he presumes to read the minds of those individuals who glare back at Frank's camera. The ascription of national-historical significance to individuals and groups insisting on their own opacity is a re-staging of Leo's relationship with Mardou in *The Subterraneans*, a moment of textual doubling reinforced by Kerouac's final "sentence" in his first outburst of stream-of-consciousness description. He writes, in reference to the photograph captioned *Beaufort, South Carolina*, "one I think incredible half Negro woman pulling on her cigarette with thoughts of her own, as pure a picture as the nicest tenor solo in jazz," echoing his characterization of Mardou.[602] Mardou haunts this photograph like a specter, suggesting that its essential American-ness emerges from its subterranean-ness. Given Kerouac's initial description of all the images embodying such a quality, it seems that Frank's "Americans" are Kerouac's "subterraneans." This places Frank in the role of Leo, but he does what Leo could not, perhaps explaining why Kerouac found Frank so fascinating: he successfully gained access to the America Kerouac held subterraneans to represent; Frank is the outsider transformed into underground inhabitant. After all, Kerouac describes him in terms reminiscent of those reserved for the underground in white hip writing. Frank acts with the "agility, mystery, genius, sadness, and strange secrecy of a shadow," suggesting that Frank's critical gaze comes from below.[603]

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[601] Ibid., 3.
[602] Ibid.
[603] Ibid., 1.

The tension between Kerouac's introduction and Frank's text foreground the national underpinnings of the hip underground. Kerouac saw Frank's project about the construction of nation and national identity as a depiction or assertion of a different kind of nation. This highlights the primacy of a national logic within the hip underground. "America" remained a fixed ordering principle, one that could not be apprehended as a construction (and thereby as deconstructable) within the hip imaginary. It could be reconstituted, but it would appear that such an act could only occur within the framework provided by the logic of containment, a logic that would shape the new nation imagined. The hip underground embarked in the same processes of nation-building that state-allied institutions actively propagating ideologies of domestic containment did, albeit in the inverse fashion characteristic of the underground.

Given Kerouac's popularity, his introduction was a powerful frame: he introduced *The Americans* to America as a visual account of subterranean citizens. This was at the same time that the underground had attained its first aboveground recognition. It was at that moment that the abstractly defined deviant space of possibility invoked in texts like *Who Walk in Darkness* and *Go* became pinned to the geo-political space of the nation. The hip underground folded quite easily into dominant culture. It continued to describe an imagined alternative, but it was an alternative positioned within Cold War culture, further muting the claims to radical exteriority those entering the underground hoped to find.

KNOWN SPACE

When white hipsters claimed to stand "in, but not of" American society, they were making a claim about their imagined location within a particular vision of the Cold War nation-state. It was a way to describe the oppositional relationship between the hip underground and the world above it. However, that relationship was far more complicated than white hipsters like Brossard, Holmes, or Kerouac conceded in their writings. Its creation was a function and consequence of the culture they claimed to ardently oppose. As this chapter has argued, the ideologies of containment that underwrote Cold War culture produced its own aboveground/underground dynamic. As the writings of prominent anticommunists like Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Whittaker Chambers, and J. Edgar Hoover attest, domestic containment constructed a vertical topography of the nation that relegated identities and practices that did not adhere to the narrow parameters of Cold War American identity to a broadly inclusive subterranean space. It was alternately queer, non-white, and mad, as well as a bastion of petty crime and drug use, all traits collapsed into the polyvalent figure of the domestic communist, the anxiety-inducing figure within the anticommunist imagination that inhabited and produced the underground. In that sense, the underground signified a matrix of deviancy particular to the culture of the Cold War. Anticommunists imagined it as a threat precisely because it was "in, but not of" American society, a community of outsiders hidden within the nation actively seeking to subvert it.

White writers and intellectuals seeking a way to reject the dominant culture of Cold America turned to this underground, embracing it as a space of unrestricted agency

and possibility. Amidst the black, queer, mad world of hustlers and junkies, they imagined new modes of being that they felt the "surface" of Cold War America prohibited. From their perspective, this was where hip emerged from, where those who were beat found a home: the underground describe the spatiality of each. Finding both Cold War Americanism and prevailing leftist radicalisms politically bankrupt, they laid claim to the repressed spaces of the Cold War imaginary as a new terrain of creative historical agency, positioning the Cold War deviant, the domestic communist shorn of all communism, as the historical agent par excellence. Literary texts like *Who Walk in Darkness* and *Go* mapped this world and the lives of individuals that inhabited it, envisioning an alternative society "in, but not of" American society, one radically divorced from it but always present within it that facilitated new modes of being.

Yet in retrospect such claims ring hollow. While such writers saw themselves as escaping dominant culture, embracing a sphere completely alternative to the mainstream, they remained firmly ensconced within it: their flight rested upon the ideological assumptions of the culture they critiqued; they operated within the framework it provided. Their opposition involved the symbolic inversion of containment's aboveground/underground dynamic, not its dismantling, meaning their vision was oddly reformist. Falling short of the radical break they imagined, they merely affixed a positive to that which the architects of containment described as a negative, a fact underscored by the degree to which the hip underground was elective. It was a space such writers *chose* to enter. Jazz critic Ralph Gleason summarizes this in his review of *On the Road*. Describing the overlapping milieu of hipsters, beats, and beboppers, he inverted the "in,

but not of" American society subterraneans proclaimed: "Jazzmen – and some jazz fans – are in the underworld, though not of it, and come to think of themselves as outside society in the way many youths think they are."[604] They had to leave America-proper to find the underworld. The works analyzed in this chapter are narratives of discovery that detail the uncovering of strange, liberating worlds that white men desperately try to enter in search of authenticity and renewed masculine vitality. Furthermore, their underground remained bound by Cold War imperatives to define the nation. The hip underground was national in scope, imagined as a nation constituted on different terms, ultimately reifying the object containment sought to protect.

This chapter has detailed a key moment in the history of the concept of a cultural underground, a moment when the idea of going underground had spread across the nation, so much so that many imagined the underground in national terms. When compared to those smaller and more fragmented undergrounds claimed by writers and intellectuals of the immediate postwar era, this underground was broader in scope and content, providing the imagined terrain of the era's most visible oppositional cultural milieu. The history of this new sense of the underground is entwined with the history of (white) hip and its popularization throughout the United States, a process that ensured that the idea of retreating or turning to the underground entered the dominant cultural lexicon. Many dissenting Americans came to recognize it as part of the radical imagination, an understood terrain of opposition, a process perhaps facilitated by the close affinities between the underground and that which it opposed. The underground's

[604] Ralph Gleason, "Kerouac's 'Beat Generation,'" *The Saturday Review*, January 11, 1958.

consolidation was not a rigid fixing of its meaning. As suggested in Chapter One, the systems and logics of meaning making an imaginary denotes are fluid, always subject to revision. The underground forged throughout the 1950s would change the following the decade, when artists inspired by subterranean creativity would reformulate the types of agency this alternative world offered. As argued in the next chapter, this was a function of artists confronting the limits of the hip underground, and the changing regulatory regimes within the American nation-state that reframed what was and was not fit for the American surface. While the champions of the underground of the 1950s celebrated the new modes of freedom it offered, those of the 1960s were committed to exercising that freedom in ways that subterraneans of the past could not imagine. Privileged figures championed the underground in the 1950s, and while this would continue throughout the 1960s, the stability of the underground as a cultural concept created opportunities for those the nation forcefully positioned there.

The earliest moments of this process are evident in the waning years of containment culture with regard to the hip underground's exclusive gender politics. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the architects of the hip underground saw it in masculine terms. It is important to remember that their subterranea was an abstraction, a powerful way to imaginatively characterize their historical lives, but an abstraction nonetheless. It was a discourse, one that did not accord with the lived reality of the underground. While imagined as a masculine sphere, it was not solely inhabited by men. The aggressive masculinity of the underground's construction might be understood as an attempt to contain or repress this fact. As literary critics Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M.

Grace write, "Notwithstanding their de facto exclusion from discourses of Beat art and creativity, women were integral to Beat's development and dispensable to expressing its signature disdain of and challenge to establishment culture and conventions."[605] Their exclusion from such discourse meant that when the idea of entering into the underground became part of the era's radical imagination they were once again left out, meaning they had to work to redefine the very idea of the underground they helped create.

The best example of this is Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*, a novel that models and re-imagines that underground imagined by writers like Brossard, Holmes, and Kerouac.[606] Johnson is best known as a memoirist of the Beat Generation. Her award-winning *Minor Characters: a Young Woman's Coming-of-Age in the Beat Orbit of Jack Kerouac* (1983) details the hip milieu with notable attention to its patriarchal underpinning. However, as Ronna C. Johnson argues, her understudied *Come and Join the Dance* is an "urtext" of Beat literature, and I would argue the underground.[607] Written in the late 1950s and published in 1961, in the midst of the hip underground's consolidation, her novel displays how the underground could be wrenched from its exclusive moorings.

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[605] Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace, "Visions and Revisions of the Beat Generation," in *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation* (New Bunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 6. See also Brenda Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1996).

[606] The novel was initially published under maiden name, Joyce Glassman. I will refer to her as Joyce Johnson given that I will be drawing from the most recent and readily available edition of *Come and Join Dance*, which lists her last name as such.

[607] Johnson, "'And Then She Went': Beat Departures and Feminine Transgressions in Joyce Johnson's Come and Join the Dance," 70.

The novel is in many strikingly similar to those of the aforementioned figures in that it is another narrative of underground discovery. It details a character's ambivalent entrance into the underground in an urban locale. It explores ten days in the life of Susan Levitt before she graduates from an unnamed women's college in New York City and visits Paris. Over the course of those ten days she drops out of the upwardly-aspirational world of her parents and college peers, and into that of her friends Kay, Anthony, and Peter. As she describes them, "They were outlaws, part of a mysterious underground brotherhood."[608] Her gendered language here points to her indebtedness to the general parameters of the hip underground as white male hipsters imagined it. This underground is both criminal and mysterious, and radically divorced from that of Susan's college peers. Kay, Anthony, and Peter all partake in the accepted range of subterranean activity: they casually drink, consume drugs, and actively distinguish themselves from square society. Anthony is a self-described communist, a character trait that locates him even further underground than many of those featured in a text like *Who Walk in Darkness.* It is worth noting that Anthony never does or says anything that would identify him as a communist. His claiming of it as a political identity might be read as an attempt to even further distinguish himself as deviant and a tacit recognition of the role of containment culture in the imagining of the hip underground. The inclusion of the female Kay in this "brotherhood" highlights the degree to which the hip milieu remained a masculine construct: even women within it are masculinized.

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[608] Joyce Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance* (New York: Open Road, 2014), 63. Such language also appears in her published correspondence with Jack Kerouac. See Joyce Johnson to Jack Kerouac, in *Door Wide Open: A Beat Love Affair in Letters, 1957-1958* (New York: Viking, 2000), 88.

However, as much as this novel corresponds to the dominant vision of the hip underground, it simultaneously undermines and critiques its masculinist underpinnings by foregrounding Susan's distinct relationship to and experience within the underground. Johnson's subterranean explorer is a young white woman who flees not the generic alienation white male hipsters attributed to dominant American culture, but the particular alienation facing white women in the 1950s, what Betty Friedan later described as the "female malaise."[609] Ronna Johnson writes, "*Come and Join the Dance* depicts the obligatory downward mobility of Beat masculinity, but problematizes what dropping out can mean when the subject is by definition of her gender already excluded from the social, political, and cultural centers of her era."[610] Susan understands this. Throughout the novel, she recognizes that in entering into the underground "outlaw world" she is embracing a more complex mode of deviancy than her male counterparts. She lays claim not to a generic subterranean identity, but what she acknowledges as a specifically gendered form of it. She becomes not an "underground man," but a "wild girl."[611] "Wildness" in the novel is most often linked to female sexual agency: a "wild girl" is one with a "bad reputation," something Susan claims to have given that "very few people thought she was still a virgin."[612] As demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, such a trait was already an underground quality, meaning Susan was already somewhat of an

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[609] Ronna Johnson, "'And Then She Went': Beat Departures and Feminine Transgressions in Joyce Johnson's Come and Join the Dance," 77. On the experience of young, white, middle-class women in the 1950s, see Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*.
[610] Johnson, "'And Then She Went': Beat Departures and Feminine Transgressions in Joyce Johnson's Come and Join the Dance," 77.
[611] Joyce Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 64.
[612] Ibid., 64, 63.

underground inhabitant. Her entrance to the underground was thereby less a matter of leaving one space and entering another, and more a matter of inventively embracing that space dominant culture positioned her within. She did not enter the underground to become deviant, but creatively reinterpreted and embraced her own alleged deviancy and its imagined spatiality. Her underground-ness involves an embrace of "wildness." Once a subterranean, Susan sleeps with both Anthony and Peter, acts she initiates and narrates, laying claim to the types of sexual agency typically preserved for men within the underground. If white male hipsters had ready access to women within the underground, within Johnson's vision of the underground, women have access to men.

Susan thereby works within and against the logic of the hip underground. She does not inhabit a different underground than Anthony and Peter, but deconstructs it from within. Throughout the novel, she asserts that she joins their underground, and that their clique "welcome[d] another member."[613] Their world pre-existed her involvement with them, but once within it, she does not act according to its terms. She ultimately leaves it: in addition to dropping out of square society, she drops out of the underground and goes to Paris. The novel concludes, "And then she went," ending just as she leaves the underground right after she has sleeps with Peter, the object of her desire throughout the novel. She acts "wild" within "their" underground, where it is permitted, but does so on her terms. She is not the only woman to do so. It is significant that that neither Anthony nor Peter serve as her primary point of contact with the underground. It is Kay, who dropped out of college and who entered into a relationship with Peter, whose path she

[613] Ibid., 84.

follows into the underground. At times, she explicitly identifies the "outlaw world" as "Kay's world."[614] It seems that for Kay and Susan, the masculine-defined hip underground offers opportunities that the surface does not, including the opportunity to redefine it and use it in ways its architects had never imagined.

Johnson's novel's illustrates the ways in which the hip underground, as an imaginary, might be repurposed or revised. Yet this could only occur one it had consolidated as broadly inclusive imagined space in the first place, a process that depended upon white discourses of hip in the postwar era. The sense of the underground that emerged in the writings of white hipsters, beats, and intellectuals fascinated with each was stable, but by no means fixed. The sense of the underground that emerged within containment culture could and would change.

[614] Ibid., 111.

Chapter 4 – Four Letter Words: Underground Aesthetics and the Obscene Community in the 1960s

"The writers, publishers, and distributors of pornographic stuff should be publically horse whipped and then jailed for life. They are a disgrace to the country, dirty disgusting vermin, creatures with little minds." – Unknown Author in note addressed to poet Judson Crews, 1960s.[615]

"Fuck Smut." – "poeteditorpublisher" d. a. levy, 1960s.[616]

In December of 1966, *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther published an article decrying the popularity of Andy Warhol and his "underground friends."[617] His essay's title was a warning: "The Underground Overflows," as if the subterranean scene white hipsters had created in the early years of the Cold War was waste the nation had failed to flush away. As he put it, "It has come time to wag a warning finger at Andy Warhol and his underground friends and tell them, politely but firmly, that they are pushing a reckless thing too far."[618] His article denounces this underground as a world inhabited by "the lower level of degenerate dope-pushers, lesbians and homosexuals."[619] He writes, "heaven knows, there are more than homosexuals and dope addicts and washed-out women in this world!"[620] In particular, he bemoaned their creative output, mockingly asking, "They call this art?"[621] Crowther's dismissive account of the underground was typical amongst those that hipsters of the previous decade would have

615 Unknown Author, Untitled Fragment, [1944-1966?], Folder 6, Box 14, Judson Crews Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin (hereafter cited as Judson Crews Papers).
616 D.A. Levy, "Fuck Smut," Sticker, [1944-1966?], Folder 6, Box 14, Judson Crews Papers.
617 Bosley Crowther, "The Underground Overflows," *New York Times*, December 11, 1966, 159.
618 Ibid.
619 Ibid.
620 Ibid.
621 Ibid.

decried as irredeemably "square," but more importantly, for my purposes, it touches on two important aspects of the 1960s underground that scholars of the era's creative life have not adequately addressed.

First, scatological implications of Crowther's language aside, the underground was "overflowing." By 1966, the community that rallied behind the banner of subterranea was larger and more diffuse, visible and more intense in a way it had not been previously. Dissident artists of the 1960s found the hip underground's claims to radical exteriority appealing. Writers, poets, musicians, filmmakers, performers, and others who did not fit neatly into such categories positioned themselves within it and experimented in ways they felt dominant cultural institutions like academia, book publishers, museums, or film studios did not permit, relishing in the imagined autonomy attributed to the underground. The underground now extended beyond the scattered hipster poets and novelists of the mid-1950s. As one writer would put it, it was a "new underground," a new subterranean community descended from that of the decade previous. By the late 1960s, numerous creative practices and communities flourished under the subterranean banner: underground literature, theater, music, film, newspapers, and comics became recognizable cultural forms. Artists working in such fields established independent presses, film distributors, and performance venues animated by subterranean beliefs about the necessity for cultural autonomy, laying the material basis for a singular artistic community. This was "the underground" Crowther denounced.

The underground Crowther decried was broad and unified by shared political and aesthetic impulses. Scholars and critics have long recognized the existence of a shared

sensibility among the bohemian and experimental artists of the 1960s.[622] However, they have rarely attended to the fact that such figures positioned their ideas and practices within the same imagined space of the underground. "The underground" needs to be thought of in the same terms as "the avant-garde" of the early twentieth century. However, it was not the continuation of that previous movement: the underground was a historically specific oppositional aesthetic movement with a distinct logic that peaked at the height of the Cold War. If they were "avant-garde," as many scholars suggest, it was only in the broadest sense of the word.[623]

The second aspect of Crowther's denunciation worth focusing on is its scatological implications: many in the underground might have embraced them. Those in the underground dwelled on the base, vulgar, and above-all, obscene to almost the same

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[622] See, for instance, Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1998); Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[623] For instance, influential scholars like Peter Bürger and Andreas Huyssen describe the arts of the American 1960s as "neo-avant-gardes." More recently, innovative works by Mike Sell, Benjamin Piekut, and Tyrus Miller use similar framing. As poet Bob Perelman has noted, "avant-garde" is a vague term often deployed in multiple senses, used to describe a specific historical movement ("the avant-garde"), a recurring artistic phenomenon ("an avant-garde"), or as an broad adjective (a movement is "avant-garde). Too often, these senses of the words become conflated, effacing the particularity of specific avant-gardes, but also homogenizing coterminous experimentalisms: it is crucial to acknowledge parallel and/or competing models of oppositional aesthetic change and activism. See Bürger, *Theory of The Avant-Garde*, 58; Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Indiana University Press, 1987), 4; Mike Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Tyrus Miller, "All Along the Watchtower: Aesthetic Revolution in the United States in the 1960s," in *Aesthetic Revolutions and Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements*, ed. Aleš Erjavec (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 145–77; Bob Perelman, "My Avant-Garde Card," *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2010): 878–79; Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, "Avant-Gardes and Partisans," in *Pollack and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 167; Kristine Stiles, "Sticks and Stones: The Destruction in Art Symposium," *Arts Magazines* 63, no. 5 (January 1989): 54–60.

degree as their critics. Their subterranea was similar in many respects to that imagined by writers like Chandler Brossard and John Clellon Holmes, but it was also markedly different. Just as "hipster" gradually became "hippie," the underground changed in kind over the course of the decade, though the metaphor of the lower depths remained an ordering principle.[624] These changes were tied to changing regulatory regimes of the mid-to-late 1960s. The ideologies of containment that so heavily shaped American life in the 1950s and early 1960s did not wield the same degree of cultural authority a decade later. If, as I have argued throughout, conceptions of the underground depend upon a binary logic, then the terms of that binary were shifting during the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Ideologies of obscenity gradually replaced those of Cold War deviancy within the underground of the 1960s. Obscenity provided the framework for underground understandings of its own exteriority, and animated its aesthetic ideologies and political imperatives: if the underground of the 1950s could be understood as the "deviant community," then that of the 1960s should be understood as the "obscene community." Subterraneans of this era gleefully embraced that which dominant culture cast as obscene and pornographic, and did so in direct proportion to those who wielded such labels against them.

My claim that the underground needs to be thought of as an "obscene community" responds to a significant gap in the scholarly literature on the underground arts on the 1960s. Much has been written about battles against censorship during this era.

[624] On this transition, see Phil Ford, *Dig: Sound and Music in Hip Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 109–118.

The standard narrative of the era resembles a triumphant narrative of progress wherein repressive obscenity laws are ultimately overcome in a victory for free speech and artistic freedom. There is certainly truth to this narrative: repressive obscenity laws *were* overcome.[625] However, the relationship between underground arts and ideologies of obscenity was more complicated. This chapter suggests that ideologies of obscenity and underground aesthetics were closely related, and that the ideologies of obscenity undergirding the prosecution of underground artists played a constitutive role in the era's aesthetic community. No scholar has explored how underground aesthetics and dominant ideologies of obscenity were dialectically entwined.[626]

This chapter offers a synthetic account of the 1960s underground, situating it within the history of the idea of the underground as the intensification and transformation of that imagined in the 1950s. It details its material and ideological bases, its relationship to reigning discourses about criminality, its aesthetic priorities, and its underlying gender politics. It begins by detailing the shared institutional ideology of the various wings of the underground, and suggests that these shared beliefs laid the foundation for a singular community. Beginning in the late 1950s, underground arts flourished as individuals and groups embraced the subterranean vision of radical exteriority, distinguishing themselves

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[625] Take, for instance, Loren Glass's excellent history of Grove Press, which explores how the publisher challenged obscenity laws via multiple avenues. See Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*.

[626] Scholars have explored dialectic and constitutive relationship between aesthetics, aesthetic communities, and ideologies of obscenity and the resulting censorial regimes in other contexts, especially with reference to British and American literary modernism. See Adam Parkes, *Modernism and the Theater of Censorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Florence Dore, *The Novel and the Obscene: Sexual Subjects in American Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Allison Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

from the mainstream of American society via their strict rejection of established institutions of arts and letters. Next, it suggests that this aesthetic community was gradually reoriented around the concept of obscenity, a direct result of the arrest and prosecution of many underground artists under various anti-obscenity laws. This led subterraneans to embrace obscenity as an aesthetic principle, a process we can understand via their embrace of "fuck" as a word and concept. Here, however, the underground's problematic assumptions about gender and sexuality rear their head most visibly: most subterraneans remained tied to masculinist assumptions. Nevertheless, women working within the underground pushed the underground's will-to-obscenity beyond that which their male counterparts imagined, offering new takes on underground visions of bodily and sexual life.

This chapter makes no attempt to be comprehensive. It does not describe the 1960s underground *in toto*. Given the volume of scholarly literature about the creative practices of the 1960s, this would be redundant. Rather, using an array of case studies drawn largely, though not exclusively, from subterranean publications and cinema, it identifies the contours of this underground so as to make it legible as a distinct formation, and by consequence a point of reference for future studies of creative practice in the 1960s.[627] It pays minimal attention to underground newspapers and comics, as these forms were less dominant in the first half of the decade, and will be discussed further in

[627] British poet and performer Jeff Nuttal singled out these forms as constitutive of "the Underground" in 1968. He writes, "The word Underground was still, in the early sixties, not yet in common use. It probably came into use in New York in 1964. Two main activities defined it, finally. Duplicated magazines and home movies." While I disagree with his claims about the origins of the term underground, he rightly points out these two forms as being the most influential. See Jeff Nuttal, *Bomb Culture* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968), 175.

the following chapter, where I will show how they took their political and artistic cues from the "obscene community" imagined in the period under study here.

A New Underground Community

Though the previous chapter dwelled upon the political dimensions of the underground, it is worth remembering that the hip subterraneans' rebellion was creative: more often than not, they forged their vision of a nation renewed in the aesthetic realm. Part of the appeal of the underground in the immediate postwar era was that it facilitated new forms of artistic expression that the surface world prohibited. While hip writers like Chandler Brossard and John Clellon Holmes published in traditional venues in the 1950s, they helped inaugurate the idea that the underground could be its own sphere of cultural production, circulation, and exchange, one with its own rules and logics. After all, it is unlikely that works like Allen Ginsberg' *Howl* or expressive techniques like Jack Kerouac's "spontaneous bop prosody" could have emerged amidst what they saw as the alienating American surface.[628] These ideas caught on: poets, filmmakers, performers, and playwrights attracted to the idea of the hip underground not only embraced subterranea, but rebuilt, intensified, and expanded it. The artists that came after Ginsberg and Kerouac aligned themselves with existing subterranean values – the primacy of individual creativity, disengagement from prevailing political structures and ideologies, and the embrace of criminality as the precondition for self-actualization – but they framed such values in relation to the institutions that sustained creative work in the

[628] Kerouac details this writing method in Jack Kerouac, "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," in *The Portable Beat Reader*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 57–58.

United States. They found most cultural institutions unwilling to let them create the art they felt necessary, and denounced them as alienating. They established their own presses, distributors, and performance venues in response, laying the material basis for a broad aesthetic community that artists would eventually call "the underground." They shared an ethical commitment to cultural autonomy based upon the principled rejection of commercialized cultural institutions as alienating and antithetical to the goals of art. This section details how this ideal jumpstarted the formation of overlapping literary, cinematic, and dramatic institutions that came together as a distinct aesthetic community, a new underground built upon the foundations of that imagined the decade previous.

The underground of the early 1960s defined itself against the commercial cultural sphere that had developed in the United States since the end of World War II. During this period, the institutional landscape of American arts and publishing changed profoundly. As white hipsters opted to go underground, the official institutions of American cultural life expanded and professionalized. For instance, art historian and sociologist Diana Crane has demonstrated that the art market and its organizational infrastructure rapidly expanded during this period, a process aided by the new prestige afforded to American art, especially that of the Abstract Expressionists.[629] "High art" became visibly more commercialized, explicitly tied to the market in ways that it had not been previously, sparking outcry amongst the modernist intelligentsia. At the same time, the American

[629] On the expansion of the art market in the postwar era, see Diana Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). On the prestige of American art in the postwar era, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

university system was expanding, a consequence of an influx of state funding provided in the name of advancing Cold War political and military interests.[630] Academia became an institutional center of support for artists and the arts to a new degree, thereby shoring up the cultural authority of university-based critics and by consequence their methods of evaluation.[631]

Underground artists of the early 1960s categorically rejected such cultural institutions as alienating. The work of Scottish underground author Alexander Trocchi offers a helpful starting point for understanding these beliefs. Based in New York in the early 1960s, Trocchi was already was somewhat of an underground celebrity. His 1960 novel *Cain's Book*, an exploration of heroin, alienation, and creativity, was already considered a classic of subterranean literature. By the mid-1960s he turned his eye towards theorizing and revising the underground community he came to prominence within. In "A Revolutionary Proposal: Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds," a 1964 essay that appeared in *City Lights Journal*, he defined professional cultural institutions as part of an alienating surface world and argued for autonomous cultural institutions that would lay the basis for a "new underground."[632]

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[630] On the history of American Higher Education during this period, see John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 260–316; Rebecca S. Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[631] Ibid., 10–11.

[632] *City Lights Journal* was affiliated with Lawrence Ferlinghetti's San Francisco-based City Lights Books. Some of the ideas in "A Revolutionary Proposal" appeared in undeveloped form in *Cain's Book*. For instance, the essay's reflections on the nature of "play" in contemporary society appear in the concluding chapter of *Cain's Book*. See Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 246–47.

Trocchi's vision of the underground was tied to his critique of commercialized cultural forms and institutions. As he understood it, alienation had become dominant within western industrialized nations, a situation reinforced by cultural institutions aligned with the state and the economy. They reproduced and sanctioned that alienation. As he put it, "entertainment" had replaced "play," while museums possessed the same "sanctimonious odours and silences" as churches.[633] Such institutions diverted art from its natural goals: "Art must inform the living; we envisage a situation in which life is continually renewed by art, a situation imaginatively and passionately constructed to inspire each individual to respond creatively, to bring to whatever act a creative component."[634] For Trocchi, creativity fostered unalienated modes of being, but its commercialization and institutionalization had created a situation in which "life is continually devitalized by art," sapping individuals of agency and rendering them "zombies."[635] In opposition to this alienated world, he called for an alternative that would replace it, reiterating longstanding subterranean preferences for prefigurative politics. He writes, "We are concerned not with the *coup-d'etat* of Trotsky and Lenin, but with the *coup-du-monde*, a transition of necessity more complex, more diffuse than the other, and so more gradual, less spectacular."[636] This was a cultural process, the creation of a world rather than the seizing of power or the transformation of existing institutions. He wrote

633 Alexander Trocchi, "A Revolutionary Proposal: Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds," in *City Lights Journal: Number Two*, Reprint (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1970), 17.
634 Ibid., 18.
635 Ibid.
636 Ibid., 14.

that "the cultural revolt is the necessary underpinning, the passionate substructure of a new order of things."[637]

Trocchi called for the creation of an international "new underground" that would inaugurate his "*coup du monde*" by jumpstarting what he called "the invisible insurrection" that would reintegrate art and life.[638] This framing marks the world of museums and "entertainment" as the surface, and links "play" and unalienated life with subterranea. He envisioned a network of independent cultural and intellectual institutions that would lay the material basis for this "new underground":

> We envisage an international organization with branch universities near the capital cities of every country in the world. It will be autonomous, unpolitical, economically independent. Membership of one branch (as teacher and student) will entitle one to membership of all branches, and travel to and residence in foreign branches will be energetically encouraged. It will be the object of each branch university to participate in and 'supercharge' the cultural life of the respective capital city at the same time as it promotes cultural exchange internationally and functions in itself as a non-specialized experimental school and creative workshop.[639]

Such institutions were the basis of his imagined "*coup-du-monde*," sites in which individuals could unleash their creative impulses without the limits of establishment institutions, thereby helping cultivate a "new and infectious sense of life."[640] The "new underground" did not consist of prevailing institutions repurposed or transformed, but of fully autonomous cultural organizations that did not bow to commercial interests. Based

[637] Ibid., 15–16.
[638] Ibid., 21.
[639] Ibid., 24.
[640] Ibid., 25.

in urban centers, they would collaborate and create the conditions under which a new un-alienated society could emerge.

Trocchi's essay synthesized already common attitudes within the 1960s underground. His "autonomous, unpolitical, [and] economically independent" institutions are analogues to the various institutions of the 1960s underground. The growth of underground arts in the 1960s was the flourishing of small-scale independent cultural institutions that relied upon and advocated ideas similar to those expressed in "A Revolutionary Proposal." The histories of underground publishing, underground film, and underground performance exemplify these processes. Their histories are particular to their branches of the culture industries, but the same themes recur within them: the rejection of commercial cultural institutions as inauthentic and alienating; the celebration of unmediated individual expression and of the production techniques that facilitated it; the creation of small-scale autonomous institutions that facilitated creative production that accorded with their ethical beliefs; and the valuation of the underground as the only space where such things could flourish. These shared commitments allowed them to coalesce into a coherent arts community, what we should call, following Trocchi, a "new underground" that later artists identified as "the underground."

The first and most expansive wing of the 1960s underground was the literary underground, a milieu committed to rejecting established critical and intellectual literary standards in favor of the values Trocchi described. Its history begins with the Beats. The popularization of subterranean ideology in the 1950s inspired a generation of poets who rejected academic poetry and the publishing industry that supported it. In this context,

academic poetry referred to the theoretical standards of the New Critics then dominant in American universities. The New Criticism inaugurated by figures like John Ransom Crowe valued impersonality, timelessness, and critical distance. It dominated leading university-subsidized poetry journals, such as *Kenyon Review*, *Sewanee Review*, and *Southern Review*.[641] Kenneth Rexroth denounced the New Critics when praising the Beats in 1957. They were "Neoantireconstructionists" that colluded with the state and capitalism.[642] As he wrote "The world of poet-professors, southern colonels, and ex-Left Social Fascists from which [San Francisco poets] have escaped has no more to do with literature than do the leading authors of the court of Napoleon III."[643] For Rexroth, their intellectual world was rendered irrelevant by the immediacy and social-mindedness of Hip-minded poets like Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Phillip Lamantia.[644]

These anti-academic sensibilities were popular enough to be anthologized. Donald M. Allen captured their spread in his now canonical anthology *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (1960). It featured Black Mountain College affiliated poets like Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, members of the San Francisco Renaissance like Jack Spicer and Madeline Gleason, Beat Generation poets, New York Poets including John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch, and a younger generation of poets such as Michael McClure

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641 On the history and politics of New Criticism, see Mark Jancovich, *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). On the role of the New Critics in establishing a poetic canon, see Alan Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 70–114. Abel Debritto lists these journals as the era's most prestigious in *Charles Bukowski, King of the Underground: From Obscurity to Literary Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 14.

642 Rexroth, "San Francisco Letter," 5.

643 Ibid., 8.

644 For a brief analysis of the relationship between San Francisco poets' anti-academicism and the larger tradition of anti-academic poetry, see Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 9–13.

and Philip Whalen. Such poets were very different from one another, but as Allen noted, they shared "a total rejection of all those qualities of academic verse," implicitly referring to those of the New Critics.[645] Scholars often cite *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* as a synecdoche for the entirety of the "new American poetry," but it was only the most visible expression of an alternative literary positionality that Allen made accessible via a literary anthology.[646] Most of the poets featured in Allen's anthology first appeared in small publications, the descendants of modernist "little mags" like *The Dial* or the Leftist "mushroom mags" of the 1930s.[647] He acknowledges this in the collection's preface, writing "These poets have already created their own tradition, their own press, and their public."[648] He is referring to what artists have since labeled the Mimeograph Revolution, the flourishing of independent presses and publications that sustained the literary underground.

The Mimeograph Revolution was the first manifestation of the urban cultural institutions Trocchi called for as components of the "new underground." It took Beat sensibilities and intensified them. Beginning in the late 1950s and persisting throughout the 1960s, poets and writers churned out literary periodicals featuring poetry, fiction,

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645 As literary critic Alan Golding notes, the anthology "provides a conflicted rather than a homogenous picture" of the postwar poetry. See Alan Golding, "'The New American Poetry' Revisited, Again," *Contemporary Literature* 39, no. 2 (July 1, 1998): 194; Donald M. Allen, "Preface," in *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*, ed. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1960), xi.

646 On the influence and legacy of *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*, see Golding, "'The New American Poetry' Revisited, Again."

647 On the relationship between modernism and little magazines, see the special issue of *American Periodicals* dedicated to the subject: Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible, eds., special issue, *American Periodicals* 15, no. 1 (2005). On "Mushroom Mags," see Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 211–20.

648 Donald M. Allen, "Preface," in *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*, ed. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1960), xi.

essays, and visual art.[649] New York City had the most famous examples. There, Hettie Jones and LeRoi Jones published *Yugen*, Diane di Prima and LeRoi Jones published *The Floating Bear*, Marc Schleifer published *Kulchur*, Ted Berrigan published *C: A Journal of Poetry*, and Ed Sanders published *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*.[650] Others appeared in hotbeds of urban subterranean activity. In San Francisco, there was Bob Kaufman's *Beatitude*, John Bryan's *Notes from Underground*, and Claude Pelieu, Mary Beach, and Chano Pazo's *Bulletin from Nothing.* In Chicago, Paul Carroll published *Big Table*. Darryl Allen Levy, better known as d.a. levy, produced multiple publications in Cleveland, Ohio, including *The Marrahwanna Quarterly*, *The Silver Cesspool*, *Poets at the Gate,* and *The Buddhist Third Class Junkmail Oracle*.[651] In Taos, New Mexico, Judson Crews published *Suck-Egg Mule*, *The Naked Ear*, and *The Dear and Dachshund.*[652] These examples are well-known, but the literary underground was not limited to such figures and publications. Most of the literary underground was obscure in its own time. For instance, in New Orleans, there was *Balls, the Ungarbled Word*,

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649 Abrel Debritto suggests that mimeograph magazine production peaked in the mid-1960s. See Abel Debritto, *Charles Bukowski, King of the Underground: From Obscurity to Literary Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15. The Mimeograph Revolution is an understudied movement, though its participants have detailed it at length. For a bibliographic account of the Mimeograph Revolution, see Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, eds., *A Secret Location On The Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (New York: Granary Books, 1998).

650 For brief histories of these publications, see Clay and Phillips, *A Secret Location On The Lower East Side*, 72–75, 84-87-168.

651 For an account of d.a. levy's publishing history and his role in the Mimeograph Revolution, see Larry Smith and Ingrid Swanberg, eds., *D.A. Levy and the Mimeograph Revolution* (Huron, OH: Bottom Dog Press, 2007).

652 On Crews's publishing history and poetry, see Wendell B. Anderson, *The Heart's Precision: Judson Crews and His Poetry* (Carson, CA: Dumont Press, 1994).

described by its editors as "a highly irreverent view from the underside."[653] In Van Nuys, California, high school students published *The Sewer*.[654] As poet David Meltzer wrote in 1971, "I could see a dedicated bibliographer coming out of his cave after a decade's work with a book as fat as a phonebook – and still not having gotten it all down."[655]

The poets that produced these magazines embodied the ideal of autonomy that Trocchi described and that would characterize the underground. They were produced artisanally by independently owned and operated presses, typically by mimeograph, a low-cost, small-scale printing technology. For example, in 1962, Sanders purchased his mimeograph for only $36.06 and operated it from his apartment in New York City.[656] Poets could produce work rapidly. Sanders reports that the process of conception, production, and distribution of *Fuck You*'s first five hundred copies took only one week.[657] Such technology allowed writers to circumvent external mediators like reviewers or editors: they could publish at will. The established their own presses to release their work and that of others: Sanders had the Fuck You Press, Levy had the Renegade Press, and Berrigan ran the C Press. New York poet Kirby Congdon ran Crank Books, as well as Interim Press along with Jay Socin. Douglas Blazek of Bensonville, Illinois operated the Mimeo Press. Informal methods of soliciting work accompanied this

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653 Roger Lovin, *Balls, the Ungarbled Word* 1, no. 3 (1968): 1, Folder 31, Box 14, American Left Ephemera Collection, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.
654 *The Sewer*, Vol. 1. No. 1, 3 May 1967, Box 7, Folder 136, American Left Ephemera Collection, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.
655 David Meltzer, ed., *The San Francisco Poets* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), 309.
656 Ed Sanders, *Fug You: An Informal History of the Peace Eye Bookstore, the Fuck You Press, the Fugs, and Counterculture in the Lower East Side* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2011), 7.
657 Ed Sanders, "Fuck You, a Magazine of the Arts," in *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (New York: Granary Books, 1998), 167.

artisanal mode of production. Poets often exchanged poems through the mail, or in person at poetry readings in coffee shops.[658] A single press could publish poets from all over the nation. For instance, Renegade Press published work by Sanders, as well as by Berrigan, Paul Blackburn, Margaret Randall, Charles Bukowski, and Carol Bergé.[659] Crews published the work of well-known poets like LeRoi Jones in *The Naked Ear*.[660] This community of poets doubled as a distribution network, circumventing traditional bookstores. Levy gave away his publications for free in Cleveland City Parks on weekend mornings.[661] Poet Tuli Kupferberg sold copies of his literary magazine *Birth* on the streets of New York City's Lower East Side.[662]

These poets founded such presses out of the belief that corporate publishers were only interested in satisfying critical standards that reinforced the alienation of modern life, arguing the same basic points as Trocchi but in a literary context. Blazek wrote in 1964, "We shun the word 'literary'; it is the key to tea & donuts on Sunday afternoons. We have no need for parlor poetry that reinforces old ideas & comforting philosophies."[663] Blazek claimed that "literature" was "like the incredible shrinking man, emaciating into a sweet nothingness of whip-cream – it's all lather & gauze & belongs in

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[658] On the importance of poetry readings to the underground community, see Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, 27–56.
[659] Ed Sanders, *King Lord, Queen Freak* (Cleveland: Renegade Press, 1964); Karl Young, "At the Corner of Euclid Ave. and Blvd St. Germain: D. A. Levy's Parables of Local Neccessity and Universal Decentralism," in *D.A. Levy and the Mimeograph Revolution* (Huron, OH: Bottom Dog Press, 2007), 162.
[660] LeRoi Jones, "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note," *The Naked Ear*, no. 10 (1958): 8–9.
[661] Kon Pet Moon, *If I Scratch, I Write: The Levy Film*, DVD (Bottom Dog Press, 2006).
[662] Sanders, *Fug You*, 107.
[663] Douglas Blazek, "Introduction," *Ole* 1, no. 1 (1964): 1.

the catacombs with the mummies."[664] Blazek was influenced by Congdon, one of the more vocal critics of the culture industries within the literary underground.[665] Congdon laid out his beliefs in the concluding article of the first issue of his mimeographed journal *Magazine* (1964) in an essay entitled "A Crank Letter to Deans, Librarians, and People who Read."[666] He argued that corporate publishers dominated the market for poetry in the United States, publishing only "inoffensive" poetry vetted by publications like *Library Journal* or the *New York Times*.[667] Such venues clung to anachronistic notions of "quality" that lead to the production of historically irrelevant work: "If you set out to write Good Poetry…you are writing for an ulterior motive: for the prestige that your tombstone may have; for the space in established magazines; for the honor in choosing to write for the ages – instead of for you and me, the readers.[668] As Congdon saw it, "Good Poets" were too concerned with pleasing "the jurys [sic] on the Guggenheim, Ford, etc. gravy trains" that valued "contrived" and "rarefied" speech "removed from any communicable form of the language."[669] They spoke only to alienating institutions, reinforcing alienation writ large within society.[670]

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[664] Douglas Blazek, "Don't Put This Book Down You Nut Until You Read This Introduction!," *Ole*, no. 2 (1965): 1.
[665] Blazek cites Congdon in the opening editorial in the first issue of *Ole*. See Blazek, "Introduction," 1.
[666] Kirby Congdon, "A Crank Letter to Deans, Librarians, and People Who Read," *Magazine* 1 (1964): n.p. Congdon's periodical, like many mimeographed works, lacks page numbers. Given the size of the publication – it is nearly 100 pages – I have opted to cite the page number of article itself (e.g. the first page of the article will be cited as one, the second as two, etc.) As noted in-text, the article is the last to appear in this issue of the publication.
[667] Ibid., 1.
[668] Ibid., 3.
[669] Ibid., 2.
[670] Ibid.

Blazek and Congdon are obscure figures, but their attitudes are emblematic of underground attitudes writ large.[671] Against commercialized institutions, they celebrated poetry that embodied longstanding subterranean values like spontaneity and personal expression that they felt could only be produced in the mimeograph-based literary underground. Blazek admonished anybody that followed academic trends and called for work that reflected their personal lives and experience: "Come on you writers of pretty poems, candy adjectives, let's get down to the business of being human….Forget all those lessons in creative writing. That was the biggest put-on ever. There is no set of rules by which to write a poem – it will come out natural when you let yr mind alone."[672] Congdon contrasted "good poetry" with the work of "real poets," those writing "for the need to blurt out something essential to you and to the times."[673] Such poems could only be found "in the form of small anthologies, such as Seventh Anthology, or magazines such as Fuck You, or The Plumed Horn in Mexico City, or the older ones like Beatitude, and The Floating Bear, or the one-man type operations like Yowl, Third Rail, or Input, printed on mimeographed sheets or broadsides in editions of about 300 and priced on a minimum scale."[674] Only the literary underground supported "real poets," publishing

[671] For other examples, see Richard Seaver, Terry Southern, and Alexander Trocchi, "Introduction," in *Writers in Revolt: An Anthology*, ed. Richard Seaver, Terry Southern, and Alexander Trochi (New York: Frederick Fell, 1963), ix – xvii; Johannes Koenig, "The Structure of the Academy Is: Against, the Street, or Versus," in *The Floating Bear: A Newsletter, Numbers 1-37, 1961-1969*, ed. Diane di Prima and LeRoi Jones (La Jolla, CA: Laurence McGilvery, 1973), 467–69.
[672] Blazek, "Don't Put This Book Down You Nut Until You Read This Introduction!," 2.
[673] Congdon, "A Crank Letter to Deans, Librarians, and People Who Read," 3.
[674] Ibid., 4.

them "not for financial or literary investment, or prestige, but simply because their work is exciting."[675]

The themes present in the history of underground publishing recur in the history of underground film, another key wing of the 1960s underground and another manifestation of the "new underground" institutions Trocchi heralded.[676] The term "underground film" is most closely associated with the experimental film community that understood itself as existing exterior to Hollywood and its associated institutions in the 1960s.[677] As in the case of underground literature, subterranean film can be traced to the Beats. Film theorist and historian David E. James suggests that underground cinema began in 1959 with the release of John Cassavetes's *Shadows*, and Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie's *Pull My Daisy*, two films deeply entwined with New York's subterranean scene that sought to cinematically duplicate its subject matter and its spirit.[678] *Pull My Daisy* featured narration by Jack Kerouac and starred Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky,

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[675] Ibid.

[676] Unlike the Mimeograph Revolution, the scholarly literature on underground film is expansive. The works most influential to my thinking here include David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, & Superstars*; Sitney, *Visionary Film*; Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance*. To avoid redundancy, I will only focus on those aspects of underground film that relate to its imagined positionality vis-à-vis the surface it defined itself against.

[677] Film critic Manny Farber was the first to link the underground with the cinematic arts. In the late 1950s, he invoked the concept to describe critically neglected and economically peripheral Hollywood productions. See Farber, "Underground Films." On Farber's criticism, see Greg Taylor, *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp, and American Film Criticism.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 30–48. David E. James claims underground cinema began in 1959 and ended in 1966 with the release and mass popularity of Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*. See James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 85–165.

[678] James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 85–100.

and Gregory Corso.[679] Such films were a cinematic platform for subterranean ideals, and inspired the notion that subterranean literary themes could animate cinematic practice.

Underground filmmakers and their supporters denounced mainstream film culture in the same terms as figures like Blazek, Congdon, and Trocchi. Filmmaker, critic, and film distributor Jonas Mekas was perhaps the foremost champion of such ideas.[680] In 1961, he helped found the New American Cinema Group, an organization committed to building an alternative film community, what they called a "new American cinema."[681] The group's first publication announced, "The official cinema all over the world is running out of breath. It is morally corrupt, aesthetically obsolete, thematically superficial, temperamentally boring."[682] They said "the very slickness" of commercial cinema was a "pervasion covering the falsity of their themes, their lack of sensitivity, their lack of style."[683] "Official cinema" was incapable of producing anything except alienated cultural works. Like Trocchi, Mekas and the New American Cinema Group saw the goals of art as the antithesis of those of commerce.[684] Mekas wrote that while film

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679 On Beat cinema, see Jack Sargeant, *Naked Lens: Beat Cinema* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2008).

680 For instance, Poet and publisher Jay Socin described him as "the leader of the underground film movement." See Jay Socin, "Blues for New York's Underground Film-Makers," *Magazine* 2 (1965): 46. On Mekas's life and career, see David E. James, ed., *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

681 This language appears in Jonas Mekas, "A Call for a New Generation of Film-Makers," in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 73–75; Jonas Mekas, "Notes on the New American Cinema," in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 87–107.

682 New American Cinema Group, "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 80.

683 Ibid.

684 In 1972, Jon Jost of film distributor Canyon Cinema wrote, "Contrary to one of the dominant myths of the Underground, film isn't a tantalizing presence unattached to the worldly problems of money, politics and labor. Nor is 'art.' Nor are those self-proclaimed genius/artists who occasionally give vent in these pages to their pious disdain for all things 'commercial.' Nope, all of these things are just like so much

production was a costly activity, "the true meaning of art is not how much money it brings in" and that films valued according to their profitability could not stand as "true art."[685]

For Mekas and those in the New American Cinema Group, the underground was where new filmmakers were creating "true art," the filmic equivalent to Congdon's "real poetry."[686] In "Movie Journal," his weekly column at the *Village Voice*, and his journal *Film Culture* (co-founded with his brother Adolfas Mekas), he linked the underground with new creative possibilities. In his oft-cited 1963 essay "On the Baudelarian Cinema" he argued that films emerging "from the underground" – namely Ron Rice's *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*, Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, Ken Jacobs's *Little Stabs at Happiness*, and Bob Fleischner's *Blonde Cobra* – marked the turn towards "a cinema of disengagement and new freedom," recalling hip ideas about the liberating possibilities of disaffiliation.[687] These films were formally experimental, often relying on improvisational measures in front of and behind the camera, traits that would characterize underground films throughout the 1960s.[688] They were deliberately transgressive, often

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bullshit." Jost's critique speaks to prevalence of such attitudes within the underground: it was a "dominant myth." See Jon Jost, "Underground Myths and Cinema Cooperative Realities (Some Concrete Policy Suggestions)," in *Canyon Cinema: Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor*, ed. Scott Macdonald (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 145.

685 Jonas Mekas, "November 7, 1963: On Money," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 106.

686 As James notes, the underground in this context denoted not a specific style, but an imagined space where new cinematic practices could emerge. See James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 95.

687 Jonas Mekas, "May 2, 1963: On the Baudelairean Cinema," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 85.

688 Underground films were frequently criticized for their allegedly amateurish cinematography and composition. Film critic Parker Tyler, for instance, described "Underground Film" as a "new, radically inspired revision of the home movie" in his dismissive 1969 account of underground cinema. See Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History*, 40.

featuring explicit and queer sex acts, effectively documenting the lives and habits of those living underground. Echoing the ideas of figures like Blazek and Congdon, Mekas valued such films because they were "personal," unmediated expressions of the deep inner lives of their creators. Such films were "opening up sensibilities and experience never before recorded in the American Arts" in ways that Baudelaire and Rimbaud did in the nineteenth century and William S. Burroughs did in the 1950s.[689] As the New American Cinema group collectively put it, "We don't want false, polished films – we prefer them rough, unpolished, but alive."[690]

For Mekas and likeminded critics, such films could only be made in the autonomous space of the underground where independent practices like those of mimeographers could flourish. Underground cinema was, in principle, an auteurist cinema premised on the belief that the filmmaker's vision ought to reach the screen sans any interference.[691] The New American Cinema Group categorically rejected "the interference of producers, distributors, and investors."[692] They adopted distinct methods of production designed to facilitate their personal cinema. Most underground directors had no connections to Hollywood or other institutions that would fund their productions.[693] Though this made funding works difficult, many saw new possibilities. The New American Cinema Group rejected the "Budget Myth," the idea that large

[689] Mekas, "May 2, 1963: On the Baudelairean Cinema," 85.
[690] New American Cinema Group, "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," 83.
[691] Ibid., 81.
[692] Ibid.
[693] This situation eventually changed. In 1963 Kenneth Anger received a received Ford Foundation Grants in the amount of $10,000 to support his work. By the end of the decade, American academe took notice and started supporting underground artists. See Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, & Superstars*, 60–62.

budgets ensured quality films and argued that "realistic budgets" ensured a degree of authorial freedom impossible within the studio system.[694] Underground filmmakers often worked independently, depending on inexpensive or borrowed equipment and material. As filmmaker and critic Sheldon Renan put it in 1967, "It is dogma in the underground, and partly true, that the disadvantages of the underground have their advantages…. If the film-maker cannot afford a crew of film technicians, he can do everything himself. Thus he is able to control very step of production.[695] Only under such conditions could film serve as a means of "personal expression."[696]

The underground film community's commitment to autonomy is also seen in the establishment of independent film distribution companies and co-operatives.[697] These institutions helped them circumvent the established institutions of Hollywood, the film equivalent to "big money publishers." In 1962, Mekas helped found the Film-maker's Cooperative with a group of other filmmakers and underground artists. The Cooperative was a non-profit institution owned and operated by filmmakers that sought to distribute underground work: filmmakers set the rental fees of their film prints, and received all the revenue they generated minus the costs the Cooperative incurred such as labor and

694 New American Cinema Group, "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," 81.
695 Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*, 48.
696 New American Cinema Group, "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," 81.
697 Non-commercial film in the United States had always depended upon independently run film distribution and exhibition organizations. In New York, the most notable was Amos and Marcia Vogel's Cinema 16, which hosted weekly screenings of avant-garde and non-Hollywood fare like documentaries and educational films. It would provide the model for Mekas's Film-Makers Cooperative. On Cinema 16, see Scott MacDonald and Amos Vogel, eds., *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

equipment costs.[698] Mekas ran the Cooperative on a "principle of nonselection," meaning it would not reject any film submissions, effectively serving as a clearing house for underground works.[699] Their model was influential, and lead to the creation of similar organizations across the United States and the world. The most notable of these was probably Canyon Cinema in San Francisco, which in many ways was the west coast counterpart to the Cooperative.[700] The proliferation of such distributors helped the underground flourish throughout the decade. In 1971, the Cooperative identified peer institutions all across the globe, including ten underground film distributors in five different states, and eight distributors in seven countries outside the United States.[701]

Underground performance constitutes the last major wing of the 1960s underground. Its history could be separated into two strands, that of "Happenings" and that of the off-off Broadway theater movement, with the later partially stemming from the

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[698] Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, & Superstars*, 68. According to the *Film-Maker's Cooperative Catalogue No. 3* (1965), seventy-five percent of income generated from a given rental was given directly to the filmmaker, while twenty-five percent were used to cover Cooperative operating expenses. See New American Cinema Group, *Filmmakers' Cooperative Catalogue No. 3* (New York: New American Cinema Group, 1965), 1965.

[699] David Curtis, "A Tale of Two Co-Ops," in *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York City Underground* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 256.

[700] Filmmaker Bruce Baille founded Canyon Cinema in 1961 as an "informal exhibition alternative" to commercial movie going. In 1966, its adopted a cooperative distributor model akin to that of the Filmmaker's Cooperative. On the history of Canyon Cinema, see Scott Macdonald, "Introduction," in *Canyon Cinema: Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1–36.

[701] The American distributors included: Audio Film Center/Ideal Pictures in Mt. Vernon, NY; Canyon Cinema Co-Operative in Sausalito, CA; Center Cinema Co-op in Chicago, IL; Contemporary/McGraw in Hightstown, NJ; Creative Film Society in Van Nuys, CA; Film Images/Radim Films in New York, NY; Grove Press in New York, NY; New Line Cinema Corporation in New York, NY; New York Newsreel in New York, NY; and Northwest Filmakers Co-op in Seattle, WA. International distributors included: Austria Film-Maker's Co-op in Austria; Canadian Film-Makers' Distribution Centre in Quebec, Canada; Filmmacher Cooperative 2 in West Germany; Japan Underground Film Center in Japan; London Film-Makers' Cooperative in England; Nederlandse Filmmakers Kooperatie in the Netherlands; and Rome Film-Makers' Cooperative in Italy. See Film-makers' Cooperative, *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue No. 5* (New York: New American Cinema Group, 1971), 4.

former.[702] Both advocated forms of performance outside the purview of established dramatic institutions and venues.[703] Allan Kaprow was the foremost practitioner of happenings, and his writings on the subject exemplify its underground qualities.[704] Scholars cite his 1959 piece, *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts*, as the first happening. He considered himself an "un-Artist," one "consciously shedding the conventions of art in order to have an unfettered experience of life."[705] He theorized happenings as the expansion of the experience of abstract expressionist art into the spatial and temporal experience of everyday life, arguing that "we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, room, or if need be the vastness of Forty-second Street. Not satisfied with the suggestion of through paint of our other senses, we shall use the specific subjects of sight, sound, movement, people, odors, touch."[706] The stuff of happenings was the experiences of that which traditional art excluded. He would later argue this could only occur outside the Academy and its associated institutions. In 1961, he claimed "the most intense and

[702] Drama historian Stephen J. Bottoms argues that off-off Broadway stemmed from Happenings in his history of underground theater. See Bottoms, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*, 33.

[703] These two forms are entwined with one another. As performance historian Judith Rodenbeck writes, "Clearly the live arts are knotted; to date no scholar has successfully untangled happenings from theater (or from performance art), nor has any art historian seriously attempted to tackle the issue." See Judith F. Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 15.

[704] "Happening" refers to a type of staged, non-narrative theatrical performance or performance art that amounted to a form of live-action collage that transformed the experience of space and time via multiple bodily, auditory, and visual components, one that clearly foregrounded the experience of the situation and environment for spectators who were brought into the act of work itself. Rodenbeck writes, "the happening was intentionally open enough to encompass the precise event style of Dick Higgins, the quasi-narrative style of Jim Dine, the lyricism of Kaprow or Carolee Schneeman, and the improvisation of Jean Jacques Leel or Al Hansen." See Ibid., 30.

[705] Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 6.

[706] Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollack (1958)," in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley, Expanded Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 9.

essential Happenings" occurred in "old Lofts, basements, vacant stores, natural surroundings, and the street."[707] Such spaces possessed a "sheer rawness," a synonym for underground ideologies of authenticity, he felt "more appropriate…in temperament and un-artiness, to the materials and directness of these works."[708] Though a happening could occur in a gallery or museum – many did – such locations were less than ideal. For Kaprow, happenings were intricately connected to those spaces exterior to sanctioned cultural institutions that required what he called "proper manners."[709] This is why he called happenings the era's "only underground avant-garde" and celebrated their ephemerality.[710] Since each performance was always unique, tied to the particular space and individuals present, they escaped incorporation into institutions like the Museum of Modern Art.

The history of off-off-Broadway mirrors that of happenings, though it opposed different cultural institutions. Taking cues from the emerging scene around happenings as well as the experimental beat theater of The Living Theatre, as its name suggests the movement defined itself stylistically and geographically in opposition to America's dominant theater culture represented by the large, professional theaters on Broadway in

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[707] Allan Kaprow, "Happenings in the New York Scene (1961)," in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley, Expanded Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 17.
[708] Ibid., 18.
[709] Ibid. Claes Oldenburg expresses similar sentiments in his 1961 manifesto "I Am for an Art," which opened with the line, "I am for an art that is politico-erotical-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum." See Claes Oldenburg, "I Am for an Art," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 335. Oldenburg's 1960s output nicely exemplifies Kaprow's ideas. On his oeuvre see, Claes Oldenburg and Nadja Rottner, eds., *Claes Oldenburg* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).
[710] Allan Kaprow, "The Happenings Are Dead! Long Live the Happenings! (1966)," in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley, Expanded Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 59.

New York City and those smaller, but still professional theaters located elsewhere in the city. Playwright and theater critic Robert J. Schroeder nicely summarized its relationship to such venues in 1967, "The established American theatre often appears to think first of real estate and then of plays to perform in the buildings. Underground plays are presented in otherwise unused church lofts, coffee houses, cellars, empty lofts and store buildings."[711] His catalogue of non-traditional performances spaces echoes Kaprow's preferred Happenings spaces and likely derives from the most well-known off-off-Broadway venues of the time: coffeehouses Caffe Cino and Café Le Mama, Judson Poet's Theater at Judson Memorial Church, and Theater Genesis at St. Marks Church.[712] In such venues, playwrights could experiment with new dramatic forms and content. As Schroeder put it, "The underground theatre defies all traditionalism and training. Its actors are provoked to an uninhibited and purposely uninformed naiveté." [713] Drama historian Stephen J. Bottoms has argued that in such venues a distinctly playwright-centric drama emerged that centered the creative vision of individual writers, especially in venues like Café La Mama where owner and curator Ellen Stewart actively cultivated emerging voices.[714]

The histories of underground publishing, film, and performance mirror each other. Artists affiliated with each shared ideological commitments. Though each wing of the underground responded to different cultural institutions, they imagined and practiced

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[711] Robert J. Schroeder, "Introduction," in *The New Underground Theatre* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), vii.
[712] Bottoms cites these venues as central to the off-off-Broadway theater movement. See Bottoms, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*, 39–123.
[713] Schroeder, "Introduction," vii.
[714] Bottoms, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*, 83–104.

aesthetic activity in the same terms and considered themselves part of the same community. The various institutions they forged – small mimeograph presses, film distributors, and independent performance venues – were the basis of a singular community, a world committed to creative exploration outside the alienated domain of established cultural institutions. This alternative world promised individual and collective self-actualization. Not only were more people interested in underground ideas, but there were more places one could go to develop and circulate new cultural forms. In this "new underground," they imagined that art and life were not in conflict, but imbricated within one another. This is why we can speak of "the" artistic or creative "underground" here rather than "an" artistic or creative underground. Taken together, the various underground milieus constitute an alternative cultural sphere that attained a new prominence in the 1960s.

In addition to their shared ethical commitments, the various wings of the 1960s underground shared an aesthetic impulse. Subterraneans of the 1960s were less concerned with what their art look liked, than with what it did: emerge unimpeded by the various mediators imposed by the culture industries and give expression to individual creative voices. For example, Congdon defined "real poetry" not in terms of what it should look like or what it was about, but in terms of what it did, which was itself a factor of where it stood in relation to the culture industries as a whole. "Realness" defined a type of relationship, meaning any number of types of poems could be "real" assuming they emerged and appeared within the appropriate channels. There was not an underground literary or poetic style per se, but there was an approach to style and form premised on

the rejection of academic standards and capitalist measures of success, insuring an idiosyncratic but nonetheless unified literary scene. This was true of the underground writ large, especially in the first half of the decade. Mekas's "principle of non-selection" fits within this terrain. As he wrote in 1965, "The medium of cinema is breaking out and taking over and is going blindly and by itself. Where to—nobody knows. I am glad about both: That it's going somewhere, and that nobody knows where it's going."[715] In the underground, the aesthetic terrain was entirely open, meaning a range of forms and styles could emerge within it and remain tied to subterranean life.

This enabled members of the various wings of the underground to collaborate. They networked in a manner akin to that described by Trocchi in "A Revolutionary Proposal." For example, in a 1963 program announcing a screening of multiple underground films, Mekas formally and thematically linked together a broad array of practices and figures within New York City's subterranean scene, describing "the new film poetry being created by the New York film underground today" as

> A free, unforced, spontaneous liberating, newborn poetry. No intellectual & formalistic & symbolist imagery, no forced act: they are light and careless and beautiful. They are made with utmost creative freedom of the image of Brakhage, the 'uncleanliness' of action painting, the Freedom of Theatre of Chance and the Theatre of Happenings, and the sense of humor of Zen. Their imagination, coming from deeply 'deranged' or, more truly, <u>rearranged</u> & liberated senses, is boundless.[716]

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[715] Jonas Mekas, "November 11, 1965: On New Directions, on Anti-Art, On the Old and the New In Art"," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), 208.

[716] Emphasis in source, Jonas Mekas, "Program 2: February 11, 1963," in *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool: Artwork, Ephemera and Photography by Jack Smith*, ed. Jonas Mekas and Johan Kugelberg (New York: Boo-Hooray, 2013), n.p.

While film serves as his touchstone, it is but one irruption of a distinct sensibility and artistic community. In 1965, New York City poet Carol Bergé described the cultural scene of the city's Lower East Side, a hotbed of underground activity, in terms reminiscent of Mekas's: "There's a great feeling of motion which pervades all the arts, a great overlap."[717] She goes on to describe an artistic network consisting of poets Allen Ginsberg, Ed Sanders, and Ted Berrigan, "modern painter" Andy Warhol, "Happenings people" like Dick Higgins, Al Hansen, and Nam June Paik, and "makers of the new music" like Philip Corner, Morton Feldman, and John Cage.[718] Such ties did not emerge by accident: they were actively forged by members of the community like Bergé, an active organizer of poetry readings, and filmmaker and Film-Maker's Cooperative employee Barbara Rubin, who made a habit of introducing underground celebrities to one another.[719] If white hipsters of the 1950s imagined a broadly populated underground, then artists of the 1960s actually worked within one. "The underground" was a social phenomenon, one that contained a range of practices. In that sense, my previous division of the underground was arbitrary: subterraneans made no such distinctions.

However, this aesthetic openness does not mean that the underground was a politically inclusive space. In principle, it was open to all, though in practice this was not the case, especially with regards to gender, as it inherited the masculinist dimensions of

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[717] Carol Bergé, "The East Village Poetry Scene," 1965, Folder 3, Box 1, Carol Bergé Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
[718] Ibid.
[719] On Bergé's literary organizing activities, see Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, 36, 41. On Rubin's activities and role within the underground, see Ara Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 26–30.

the hip underground. Congdon described it as part of a tradition of "democratic involvement in the arts by the intelligent reading public in general, not merely by professional 'judges' in schools, offices and libraries."[720] Mekas heralded the emergence of female directors as proof of the underground's egalitarian impulse, decrying "the cinema of big production and heavy equipment" as a "very masculine occupation and art," and praising the work of Naomi Levine, Storm De Hirsch, Barbara Rubin, Linda Talbot, and Marie Menken.[721] For him, the ascendance of such filmmakers heralded a new era of cinematic production: "For now cinema has become accessible to all."[722] Such statements should be taken seriously, though not naively. The underground remained primarily, though certainly not exclusively, the domain of white male artists.[723] For instance, men helmed most mimeographed magazines.[724] More underground films by men circulated than those by women.[725] These disparities are important because they

[720] Kirby Congdon, "Letter," *Magazine* 4 (1969): 90.
[721] Jonas Mekas, "July 25, 1963: On Women in the Cinema," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 89–90.
[722] Ibid., 89.
[723] Notable exceptions here include free jazz experimentalist Sun Ra and his Arkestra, as well as Horace Tapscott's Underground Musician's Association. See John F. Szwed, *Space Is The Place: The Lives And Times Of Sun Ra* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998); Horace Tapscott, *Songs of the Unsung : The Musical and Social Journey of Horace Tapscott*, ed. Steven L. Isoardi, First Edition (Duke University Press Books, 2001).
[724] For instance, of the 282 journals and presses founded before 1973 (the generally accepted date for the end of the "long sixties") listed in Steven Clay and Rodney's Phillips's *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980*, perhaps the most comprehensive published bibliography of the Mimeograph Revolution, only three feature the involvement of women in any editorial capacity. Though their collection is incomplete, it nevertheless features a large enough sample to demonstrate significant gender disparities in the mimeo publishing world. See Clay and Phillips, *A Secret Location On The Lower East Side*.
[725] Of the 104 different directors listed in the *Film-Makers Cooperative Catalogue* of 1965, only seven were women. Of the 476 different directors listed in the *Film-Maker's Cooperative Catalogue* of 1971, only 38 were women. See New American Cinema Group, *Filmmakers' Cooperative Catalogue No. 3*, 7–66; Film-makers' Cooperative, *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue No. 5*, 7–346.

highlight the disjuncture between underground rhetoric and reality, as well as point to an important continuity between the deviant hip underground of the 1950s and that of 1960s.

BECOMING OBSCENE

Outside of "establishment" cultural institutions, artists were free to explore topics that the mainstream would never touch, including the range of subjects present within the hip underground of the 1950s: drugs, sex, queerness, madness, and anything else rendered taboo by dominant culture. The community described in the previous section remained committed to the liberating possibilities of criminality and deviance. Each issue of Blazek's *Ole*, for instance, bore the dedication, "Dedicated to the cause of making poetry dangerous," evoking an image of the poet as an insurrectionary rebel.[726] He jokingly linked it with drugs, writing, "Read at your own risk. It's [sic] contents may be harmful if taken internally or seriously & are known to be habit forming."[727] Mekas praised the underground filmmakers who explored homosexuality in ways that Hollywood film never could, and praised what director Ken Jacobs called "dirty-mouthed films."[728] In underground theater, playwrights like Caffe Cino regular Doric Wilson and Play-House of the Ridiculous writer-in-residence Charles Ludlam explored gay identities on underground stages in ways that would not be permitted on Broadway.[729] The underground remained a space defined by criminality where alternative modes of being could flourish.

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[726] Douglas Blazek, ed., *Ole* 1, no. 1 (1964); Douglas Blazek, ed., *Ole*, no. 2 (1965).
[727] Blazek, 1965, 1.
[728] Mekas, "May 2, 1963: On the Baudelairean Cinema," 86.
[729] On Wilson's and Ludlam's work, see Bottoms, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*, 49–62, 230–33.

After all, subterraneans did not just imagine escape from museums, libraries, universities, and popular movie theaters: their imagined flight underground was from the entirety of dominant American culture. While their cultural institutions were autonomous in that they were not connected to mainstream institutions, they still existed in the physical space of the United States, and as such were entwined with various other institutions they hoped to imaginatively distinguish themselves from. However, these institutions helped shape their sense of exteriority. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, underground exteriority is legible only in relation to the ideological and material structures of power that first produce it by relegating people, places, and practices to the lower depths. This was as true in the 1960s as it was in the 1950s, though the mechanism by which dominant culture produced that underground changed between those two decades. Ideologies of obscenity replaced Cold War ideologies of deviancy, gradually transforming the underground from a deviant to an obscene space in the eyes of its detractors and its supporters. The dominant perception of the underground as obscene helped consolidate ties within it. That is to say, it played a constitutive role in the 1960s underground: by the latter half of the decade, the deviant community of the underground would be understood as an "obscene community," setting the stage for artists to embrace the concept as an aesthetic principle as a means of imaginatively distinguishing themselves from the rest of dominant culture.[730]

[730] Scholars have explored dialectic and constitutive relationship between aesthetics, aesthetic communities, and ideologies of obscenity and the result censorial regimes in other contexts, especially with reference to British and American literary modernism. See Parkes, *Modernism and the Theater of Censorship*; Dore, *The Novel and the Obscene: Sexual Subjects in American Modernism*; Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity*.

Before detailing the transformation of the underground into an obscene community, it is worth defining and briefly exploring obscenity and the closely related concept of pornography as individuals and the state understood them at the time. Both are slippery terms. In fact, their slipperiness enabled the state, police, and conservative moral crusaders to freely wield the terms against underground artists.[731] As art critic Kirsten Mey puts it, "obscenity names an argument rather than an object."[732] The same is true of pornography. Historian Whitney Strub argues that "obscenity" is a technical and legal concept used to describe speech that the state has decreed unprotected by the first amendment of the constitution, while "pornography" is a cultural term typically used to describe sexually explicit representations. [733] Legal historian Richard F. Hixson suggests that the only difference between the two is the context in which they are mobilized: he writes that pornography becomes a matter of obscenity when its "proscribed by law."[734] One might say that all pornography is obscene, but not all obscenities are pornographic.

The legal definition of obscenity evolved a great deal over the first half of the American twentieth century, but despite its many changes it had one key function: to police the boundaries of socially permissible expression, especially with regards to

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[731] A range of synonyms often took the place of "obscenity" and "pornography." As Strub describes a 1955 Maryland Supreme Court's ruling that attempted to define "obscenity," "Definitions of obscenity and its synonyms descended into a parade of verbal horribles: disgusting, filthy, foul, abominable, 'offensive to chastity and modesty,' licentious, 'having a tendency to excite lustful thoughts, polluted and many, many more terms filled the opinion." See Whitney Strub, *Obscenity Rules: Roth v. United States and the Long Struggle over Sexual Expression* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 129.

[732] Kerstin Mey, *Art and Obscenity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 18.

[733] Strub, *Obscenity Rules: Roth v. United States and the Long Struggle over Sexual Expression*.

[734] Richard F. Hixson, *Pornography and the Justices: The Supreme Court and the Intractable Obscenity Problem* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 1.

sexuality.[735] Until the 1930s, the so-called Hicklin Test was the dominant legal framework. It equated obscenity with that which was "lewd" or "lascivious," and held that speech (broadly defined) was obscene if it posed any harm to those imagined most susceptible, namely children.[736] This changed in 1933, when the Supreme Court ruled that James Joyce's *Ulysses*, previously found to be obscene, was not so given that its depictions of sex and masturbation possessed social and literary merit.[737] In 1957, the Court revised its definition again, when Justice William J. Brennan laid down clear parameters for how the state should judge a given work's obscenity. In the majority decision of *Roth v. United States*, Brennan argued that obscenity was not protected speech and that the depiction of sex was not *ipso facto* obscene. He effectively a proposed a test: to determine if a work was obscene, one would have to consider "whether, to the average person, applying contemporary community standards the dominant theme of the material, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interests."[738] The two key phrases here are "community standards" and "prurient interest." The former links obscenity with specific social contexts, while the latter links it to allegedly immoral sexualities determined as such by said social contexts. *Jacobellis v. Ohio* of 1964 defined

[735] Of course, it certainly policed other spheres of life. For instance, Whitney Strub demonstrates that ideologies of obscenity were racialized in the American South. See Whitney Strub, "Black and White and Banned All Over: Race, Censorship and Obscenity in Postwar Memphis," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 685–715.
[736] Hixson, *Pornography and the Justices: The Supreme Court and the Intractable Obscenity Problem*, 7; Strub, *Obscenity Rules: Roth v. United States and the Long Struggle over Sexual Expression*, 24.
[737] On the legal and cultural history of censorship of *Ulysses* in the United States, see Jeffrey Segall, *Joyce in America: Cultural Politics and the Trials of Ulysses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Paul Vanderham, *James Joyce and Censorship: The Trials of Ulysses* (New York: NYU Press, 1997).
[738] *Roth v. United States*, 354 U.S. 476 (1957). On the history and politics of this court case, see Strub, *Obscenity Rules: Roth v. United States and the Long Struggle over Sexual Expression*.

"community standards" in relation to the national community, linking the threat of "prurient interests" to the ideological standards of the nation as a whole.

If deviancy was the category by which the state demarcated acceptable and un-acceptable Americans in the 1950s, then obscenity functioned similarly a decade later with regard to the content of speech and representation. As these last two court cases suggest, ideologies of obscenity were intricately connected to ideologies of the nation. Preeminent scholar of pornography Linda Williams has suggested that ideologies of obscenity hinge upon the construction of boundaries between public and private, visibility and invisibility: "In Latin, the accepted meaning of the word *obscene* is 'off-stage,' or that 'which must be kept out of public view'."[739] In these cases, that stage is the space of the nation. Within the frameworks of *Roth* and *Jacobellis*, that which is obscene is that which cannot be incorporated within the discursive borders of particular imagined communities, specifically of America as an idea and a place in the case of *Jacobellis*. The state constructs equivalence between the obscene and the un-American, imaginatively positioning the former outside the domain of the nation in the same way that "deviant" or "domestic communist" did in the 1950s. Broadly speaking then, the obscene was thereby that which was non-normative, but especially with regards to sexuality, which now took precedence over radical political affiliation as public enemy number one within the dominant American imaginary.

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[739] Linda Williams, "Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene: An Introduction," in *Porn Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

Importantly though, obscenity was a legal category: it was a means of constructing criminality in the eyes of the State. In a sense, obscenity became the privileged legal category by which to prosecute alleged deviancy. Consequently, it positioned works and the figures that produced or distributed them in the criminal space of underground. The state enforced laws and ideologies of obscenity through a variety of means, frequently arresting, censoring, and otherwise repressing allegedly obscene materials and practices. In the 1950s, the state, usually through agencies like the FBI, prosecuted communists and gay activists like those of the Mattachine Society under the umbrella of obscenity, examples that attest to the overlap between Cold War ideologies of deviancy and obscenity.[740] At the same time, local Post Offices regularly opened mail and seized allegedly obscene materials, a practice best known via the actions of censor Anthony Comstock in the nineteenth century, but one that persisted throughout the twentieth. In 1959 alone, there were "4,000 [Post Office] investigations of alleged violations of the Comstock Act," resulting in 315 arrests.[741] In the 1960s, there were also multiple grassroots-level organizations that sought to limit access to allegedly obscene materials and publically shame the authors of such materials. Organizations like Citizens for Decent Literature (CDL), National Office for Decent Literature (NODL), and Americans for Moral Decency worked to pressure citizens and state institutions to more

[740] Strub, *Obscenity Rules: Roth v. United States and the Long Struggle over Sexual Expression*, 129; Douglas M. Charles, *J. Edgar Hoover and the Bureau's Crusade Against Smut* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 45. As Charles M. Douglas demonstrates, the FBI was interested in prosecuting the obscene since its founding. At J. Edgar Hoover's behest, the organization compiled and investigated a centralized "obscene file" beginning in the 1940s. See Charles, *J. Edgar Hoover and the Bureau's Crusade Against Smut*.

[741] Quoted in Michael B. Goodman, *Contemporary Literary Censorship: The Case History of Burroughs' Naked Lunch* (Metuchen, N.J: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 27.

aggressively police obscene and pornographic materials, or as the CDL put it, "Dam the floodtide of filth" across the nation.[742] Such figures rarely used the term underground, but it did emerge on occasion. For instance, the authors of exposés of obscene literature and the deviant practices they depicted cast them in underground, as can be seen in works like Michael Leigh's *The Velvet Underground* (1963) and Roger Jordan's *Hollywood's Sexual Underground* (1966).[743]

However, the explicit categorization of the obscene as underground was unnecessary given that there was a self-defined underground increasingly linked with obscenity in the popular imagination. The state effectively labeled the hip underground obscene. Since its content consisted entirely of that which the dominant space of the nation rendered deviant or taboo, it is no surprise that artists that claimed that realm were frequent targets of state agencies and independent pressure groups seeking to eradicate obscenity and pornography. In particular, its explorations of drug use and criminalized sexualities drew extensive police attention. A list of those publicly denounced or prosecuted as obscene is basically a "who's who" list of subterranean artists. In 1957, San Francisco Police arrested City Lights Bookstore manager Shigeyoshi Murau for selling Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, and shortly thereafter they arrested City Lights Books owner Lawrence Ferlinghetti for printing it. The state of California charged both with

[742] On the history of Citizens for Decent Literature and related groups, see Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 80–115. The NODL frequently published lists of objectionable publications, acting as an adjunct to the Catholic Legion of Decency, which published similar material about Hollywood films. See National Office for Decent Literature, "Publications Disapproved for Youth," *National Office for Decent Literature Newsletter* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1965): 6–13. NODL and Americans for Moral Decency

[743] Leigh, *The Velvet Underground*; Jordan, *Hollywood's Sexual Underground*.

distributing obscene materials, with prosecutors focusing on the poem's references to heterosexual and homosexual sex acts, as well as its references to various four-letter words.[744] In 1959, the publishers of Chicago-based little magazine *Big Table* were arrested under similar charges for printing and distributing selections of William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*.[745] Throughout the decade, postal officials in Taos routinely searched poet Judson Crews's mail and seized material they found objectionable.[746] In 1961, San Francisco police arrested hip comedian Lenny Bruce on charges of obscenity for saying "cocksucker" at a performance at the Jazz Workshop.[747] The same year, postal authorities seized copies of LeRoi Jones's *The Floating Bear*, and police arrested him for sending obscene material through the mail.[748] In the mid-1960s, New York City police frequently raided coffee shops during poetry readings, enforcing the city's Administrative Code as it pertained to the operation of coffeehouses: it strictly prohibited "disorderly, obscene, or immoral conduct."[749] When Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* premiered in 1963, police promptly seized the film. New York City courts later found it obscene. Police arrested Mekas himself multiple times for screening obscene material.[750] In 1966, New York City police arrested Ed Sanders for distributing obscene materials and

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[744] Bill S. Morgan and Nancy J. Peters, eds., "Excerpts from the Trial Transcript," in *Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2006), 127–96.
[745] Goodman, *Contemporary Literary Censorship*, 23–110.
[746] Ross Rizley to Judson Crews, 9 April 1953, Folder 5, Box 14, Judson Crews Papers; Robert W. Dill to Judson Crews, 27 February 1956, Folder 5, Box 14, Judson Crews Papers.
[747] Fred Kaplan, *1959: The Year Everything Changed* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 61.
[748] J. R. Goddard, "Poet Jailed for Obscenity; Literary Magazine Hit," *Village Voice*, October 26, 1961.
[749] Quoted in Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, 49–50. On the persecution of New York City poets under this law, see Ibid., 48–53.
[750] Jonas Mekas, "Mary 19, 1964: Report From Jail," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972).

Cleveland police charged d.a. levy with contributing to the delinquency of a minor for saying "cocksucker" at a poetry reading with teenagers in attendance.[751] If they were not being arrested for obscenity, such figures were denounced as such by tastemakers and intellectuals. For instance, the president of The Poetry Society of New Hampshire told Congdon, "In spewing your filth, you are not as you claim advancing the cause of poetry, but rather degrading it. Others, skunks that they are, have tried it, left their stink behind them, and ran off in the woods."[752]

The prosecution of underground artists had three effects. First, it criminalized them to a new degree. While those in the underground of the 1950s embraced criminal attitudes, acts, and practices, most, though certainly not all, remained in positions of privilege. Put simply, most of them did not spend any time in jail, and their livelihoods were not threatened by the state. That could not be said of many figures in the 1960s underground. That is not to say that everyone was equally deviant in the eyes of state, or that they were criminalized in the same way. The experience of the white, straight Sanders was undoubtedly very different than the queer Smith, which was in turn very different than the arrest of the African American Jones, who was also engaged in an interracial relationship at the time. However, the prosecution of underground artists changed their relationship to the state and to discourses of deviancy. Their experience of criminality was less abstract. When Mekas claimed in 1964 that "The existing laws are driving art underground," he was speaking in more concrete terms than previous

[751] Sanders, *Fug You*, 183–91.
[752] Raymond C. Swain, "Letter to Kirby Congdon, July 1, 1964," *Magazine* 2 (1965): 48.

subterraneans: many underground film screenings, especially of prosecuted works like *Flaming Creatures* or Jean Genet's *Un chant d'amour* (1950, seized alongside Smith's film), had to occur in secret, privately held screenings.[753] Many mimeographed magazines had to be sold discreetly. These artists did not need to seek out the underground, as the state was pushing them there.

Second, it popularized the underground as obscene. When the concept circulated, it was understood in such terms. This process began with the first notable obscenity trial in the underground: the so-called "*Howl* Trial." Though booksellers Murau and Ferlinghetti were the ones on trial, Allen Ginsberg and the poem were the focus of most popular attention. As *San Francisco Reporter* David Perlman wrote in 1957, the trial made *Howl* a bestseller.[754] Literary critic Philip Whaley has argued that the trial produced *Howl* as a spectacle, meaning "it had become a social event with a trajectory that could be watched, talked about, toasted, cursed, speculated upon, and analyzed."[755] It linked the beats and the hip underground they emerged from with obscenity. This pattern would recur with each high profile obscenity trial. As film theorist Ara Osterweil writes, when *Flaming Creatures* was put on trial in 1963 it became "Underground cinema's *cause célèbre*," and attracted the attention of established subterraneans like Ginsberg and the interest of public intellectuals like Susan Sontag.[756] Less than a year after Sanders's 1966

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[753] Jonas Mekas, "March 12, 1964: Underground Manifesto on Censorship," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), 127.
[754] David Perlman, "How Captain Hanrahan Made Howl a Best-Seller," in *Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression*, ed. Bill Morgan and Nancy J. Peters (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2006), 201–7.
[755] Whaley, *Blows Like a Horn*, 14.
[756] Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film*, 6. See also J. Hoberman, "Crimson Creatures: The Case Against Flaming Creatures," in *On Jack Smith's Flaming*

arrest, *Life* magazine featured him on the cover as the leader of the underground, New York's "other culture."[757] In the 1960s, the underground was typically associated with obscenity, meaning many first encountered it as an obscene, rather than deviant, milieu.

Third, the prosecution of underground artists galvanized the community and ultimately consolidated ties between different wings of the underground. The harassment and arrest of underground artists was a frequent topic of discussion in subterranean circles. Mekas discussed it repeatedly in the pages of the *Village Voice*.[758] Most of the major mimeographed magazines tackled it directly, often attempting to rally readers to the cause of specific artists that had faced harassment within their communities. For instance, in San Francisco, *Notes from Underground* featured photographs and commentary on local sculptor Ron Boise's sexually explicit and abstract "Kama Sutra Sculptures" after it was seized by local police and the gallery owners displaying it were arrested for distributing obscenity.[759] Such activities brought different artists together in the name of combatting obscenity. After New York Police arrested Mekas, founders of the Living Theater Julian Beck and Judith Malina, poet and writer Diane di Prima, painter

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Creatures (and Other Secret-Flix of Cinemaroc) (New York: Granary Books, 2001). As Sontag described the film and the controversy surrounding it, "The only thing to be regretted about the close-ups of limp penises and bouncing breasts, the shots of masturbation and oral sexuality, in Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* is that they make it hard simply to simply talk about this remarkable film. One has to defend it." See Susan Sontag, "Jack Smith's Flaming Creatures," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 226.

[757] *Life*, February 17, 1967.

[758] Jonas Mekas, "March 12, 1964: On Obscenity," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), 126–27; Mekas, "March 12, 1964: Underground Manifesto on Censorship"; Jonas Mekas, "April 23, 1964: On Law, Morality, and Censorship," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), 132–36.

[759] "The Confiscated Ron Boise Kama Sutra Statutes," *Notes from Underground* 1 (1964): 30–37. For more on Boise's work, as well as the obscenity trial that followed his arrest, see Jim Wolpman, February 23, 2015, *Ron Boise: Life and Work*, accessed September 29, 2015, http://boiselifeworks.info/.

and filmmaker Alfred Leslie, Ginsberg, and Sanders rallied together, which led directly to the founding of a small group called the Committee for the Freedom of the Arts in 1964.[760] The group dedicated itself to defending the full spectrum of underground arts. In an announcement released in 1964, it claimed it would be fighting against:

1. Licensing of films
2. Seizure of films and art works as obscenity
3. City zoning against artists' living lofts
4. Censorship of books
5. Federal seizure of the Living Theatre
6. The arrest of Lenny Bruce on obscenity charges
7. Harassment of coffee houses and loft theatres by police, fire department, and city license department
8. License department closings of off-Broadway theatres.[761]

The announcement drew no distinctions between different artistic communities, pointing to the degree to which these figures saw themselves as inhabiting a shared space experiencing the same political and legal pressures. Ideologies of obscenity were a shared threat.

The best, and perhaps most expansive, example of this impulse can be found in a 1965 issue of *Blacklist*, a mimeographed magazine edited by Ronald Norman and Michael Cohn out of Maplewood, New Jersey. This issue is notable for its sheer size and

[760] Karl Bissinger to Ed Sanders, Letter, 16 March 1964, Folder 275, Box 11, Ed Sanders Papers; Committee for the Freedom of the Arts, "Committee for Freedom of the Arts," Announcement, New York, 1964, Folder 450, Box 18, Ed Sanders Papers.
[761] Committee for the Freedom of the Arts, "Committee for Freedom of the Arts."

the scope of its contributors. Coming in at over one hundred pages, it brings together poetry, song lyrics, essays, mock screenplays, comics, artist profiles, political diatribes, bibliographic listings of other mimeo magazines, news clippings, and visual arts. In a sense, it features every conceivable form of underground cultural activity. It features over sixty different contributors, including many of the figures I have discussed thus far, and more: Sanders, Mekas, Congdon, Kupferberg, Smith, Berrigan, Warhol, *The Realist* editor Paul Krassner, singer and songwriters Joan Baez and Pete Seeger, playwright Edward Albee, poet and dancer Gerard Malanga, poet Diane Wakoski, and many others. The magazine's opening editorial frames the magazine as a window onto an artistic world repressed by what the editors call the "Social Blacklists" that have "spiritually killed more human beings than all our wars" and spread a "mood or feeling" best understood as a "misty scum which envelops and drowns us."[762] The editors detailed its actions:

> It prevents babies from playing with their penises and vaginas, giving birth to two children, Love and Sex, which should be brothers but are not.
>
> It creates the richest-poorest, most frustrated-unloving country on earth.
>
> It muzzles human spirit and shoves it into several barely tolerated hovels, such as Greenwich Village.
>
> It sees vulgarity in beauty and seizes films, poetry, plays, literature: the blood of artists.
>
> It scientifically mutilates our entire species, burying all that Man has developed, resurrecting all the evil he has perpetrated, changing souls into IBM cards and punching holes in them every time the economic-military rulers crave another dollar or life.[763]

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[762] Ronald Norman and Michael Cohn, "Blacklist Editorial," *Blacklist*, no. 6 (1965): 1.
[763] Ibid.

For the editors, the blacklist is a totalizing regulatory apparatus that represses sexuality and creativity in the name of capital accumulation, a position indebted to longstanding subterranean ideologies of mainstream institutions. The editorial goes on to declare, "We are all on the Blacklist" and ends with a dedication: "This issue is published for all of us who are on subtle or blatant blacklists."[764] Here, "We" and "us" refers to those featured within the magazine, as well as its imagined audience. This suggests that the editors envisioned its contributors and readers as part of a distinct community formed via the repressive actions of the "social blacklists." Given that many of the figures featured within the magazine were prosecuted for obscenity, "social blacklists" functions as a synonym for the formal and informal prosecution of these artists as obscene, a connection reinforced by the fact that police later identified the magazine itself as obscene. New York Police seized it from Sander's Peace Eye Bookstore, identifying its cover (which depicted a nude male figure with an erect penis), Wakoski's "Overweight Poem" (which used the words "fuck" and "fucking"), and Cohn's "Rain" (which explicitly details sexual intercourse) as evidence in the case against Sanders for distributing obscene materials.[765] In that sense, *Blacklist*, the community it documents, and that which it circulated within existed by virtue of its perception and prosecution as obscene. Obscenity was thereby the social glue that held this community together.

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[764] Ibid.

[765] The archivists at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center at the University of Connecticut, which houses the Ed Sanders Papers, have preserved the police authored notes that accompanied seized material. The note attached to *Blacklist* singles out the cover, Wakoski's poem, and Cohn's poem. See NYPD Note Attached to Blacklist, 1966, Folder 443, Box 17, Ed Sanders Papers; Diane Wakoski, "Overweight Poem," *Blacklist*, no. 6 (1965): 23–24; Michael Cohn, "Rain," *Blacklist*, no. 6 (1965): 29–32.

The prosecution of underground artists as obscene amounts to a reconstitution and reorientation of the underground around the concept of obscenity: it took the place of Cold War ideologies of deviancy, redefining subterranean perception of what constituted the American surface and what lay beneath it. *Blacklist* captures this transition. The opening editorial's rhetorical framing is directly indebted to the regulatory regimes of containment culture: the word "blacklist" harkens back to McCarthyist repression, the influence of which is further seen in the inclusion of a poem entitled "Poems to Celebrate the Celebracy of the Un*American House Activities Committee." Authored by editor Ron Norman, it is a satiric recounting of the titular committee's repressive actions that the poem deploys as a synecdoche for the entire Cold War political and military apparatus of the 1950s and 1960s.[766] However, unlike HUAC and the blacklists of McCarthyist repression, the editors' "Social Blacklist" does not depend upon the structuring absence of the figure of the domestic communist, the very target of the most famous blacklists. Rather, it focuses on issues and practices yoked together via discourses of obscenity. There is an anachronist dimension here: the editors' rhetorical framing and their content emerge out of distinct regulatory regimes. They use the language of containment culture to describe the community that emerged within it, but outlasted its peak influence. The magazine's historical disjunction between rhetoric and content speaks to how this issue, really a comprehensive anthology of a "blacklisted" milieu,

[766] Ron Norman, "Poems to Celebrate the Celebracy of the Un*American House Activities Committee," *Blacklist*, no. 6 (1965): 60.

documents an underground in transition, from one that understood itself as inhabiting a deviant space to one inhabiting an obscene space.

The underground of the 1960s needs to be understood as an obscene community. As I demonstrate above, the charge of obscenity was a means of removing objectionable ideas and practices from the imagined space of the nation. If a claim to radical exteriority was the underground's first ethical principle, the cumulative impact of the underground's formal and informal prosecution for obscenity was that subterraneans increasingly defined that exteriority in relation to the ideologies that underwrote their prosecution. The imagined terrain of subterranean opposition took the shape of the object they opposed. This is chiefly, though not exclusively, a matter of framing. For instance, Dov Seeger's poetic ode to queer sex, "Joy! A Love-Making Experience Between Two Men," was deviant in the Cold War imagination, but the editors included it in *Blacklist* because it treaded obscene waters.[767] The institutional bases of the 1960s underground, those forged in the waning years of the 1950s and outlined in the first section of this chapter, did not change imaginative location or position, but subterraneans working within them began to see themselves and their self-established institutions in different terms. That is not to say the content remained unchanged, as there was clearly a change in emphasis in subterranean substance. As I demonstrate in the following two sections, artists came to celebrate obscenity, inverting the label applied to them by the state and dominant culture. They claimed obscenity as a virtue.

[767] Dov Seeger, "Joy! A Love-Making Experience Between Two Men," *Blacklist*, no. 6 (1965): 75.

WHAT? THE FUCK!

The prosecution of underground artists led them to double-down on their desire to inhabit the imagined spaces dominant culture criminalized, leading subterraneans to embrace the obscene as a realm of creative possibility, effectively labeling the "new underground" an obscene space. As Jack Smith put it in 1963, "All of the beautiful and poetic young filmmakers of the new American cinema have been making dirty, nude movies lately because we are told not to – naughty aren't we."[768] Mekas identified this same impulse in film, publishing, and theater.[769] Smith's pithy remark about underground "naughtiness" suggests this was a deliberate response to harassment and prosecution.[770] Underground artists began wielding textual and visual representations of visceral bodies, sexuality, and drug use as weapons against censorship. We might consider the obscene community as a deliberately perverse variation on the Civil Rights Movements' vision of a "beloved community," a movement oriented towards the building of a new obscene America premised on that which it pushed "off-stage." By literally and figuratively shouting obscenities, subterraneans believed they could dive off stage into a realm of creative possibility. Obscenity shaped both the content and form of underground arts throughout the middle of the decade. However, these aesthetics were deeply problematic. Often times the underground impulse to shock reflected deeply masculinist assumptions that mirrored the predominantly male make-up of the underground. These subterraneans

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[768] Jack Smith, "The Astrology of a Movie Scorpio," in *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool: The Writings of Jack Smith* (New York: High Risk Books, 1997), 54.

[769] Mekas, "March 12, 1964: On Obscenity," 126–27.

[770] Film critic Parker Tyler denounced them for this very reason. In his *Underground Film: A Critical History* (1969), he argued that an infantile desire to voyeuristically violate taboos drove underground filmmakers. See Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History*, 1–17.

often relied upon images of the female body and sexuality, but only insofar as they served their purposes of rhetorically carving out an obscene space in American culture. Frequently, women were seen as the raw material of underground arts, and not as its agents.

The best way to get at the underground embrace of obscenity is through the word "fuck." The word itself was often the specific target in the investigations, arrests, and prosecution of artists, publishers, and related figured for offenses related to obscenity. For instance, when prosecutors questioned literary experts on the social and literary merit of *Howl* during Murau and Ferlinghetti's trial in 1957, they often focused on the implied use of "fuck."[771] The word did not appear in the published version of the poem – ellipses took its place, as they did with other allegedly obscene words – suggesting that its evocation was enough to rile would-be censors. Nor did prosecutors or judges use the word in the trial, a common move amongst state and legal officials when they discussed allegedly obscene texts.[772] "Fuck" occupied an ambiguous legal and cultural position at the time. Its appearance in print media was rare and avoided, but not always considered illegal. It appeared throughout *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and when American courts ruled that those texts were not obscene in 1933 and 1959, respectively, judges took care to note that their uses of the word served literary purposes.[773] The 1960s saw its proliferation in print, music, and in public, but with its antagonistic and sexual

[771] Morgan and Peters, "Excerpts from the Trial Transcript," 139.
[772] Jesse Sheidlower, "Introduction: About the F-Word," in *The F Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xxi.
[773] Ibid., xx–xxi. On modernism and obscene language, see Loren Glass, ""#$%^&*!?: Modernism and Dirty Words," *Modernism/Modernity* 14, no. 2 (April 2007): 209–23; Loren Glass, "Redeeming Value: Obscenity and Anglo-American Modernism," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 341–61.

connotations it continued to provoke censors and the police.[774] This section and the next use "fuck" in all its connotations, as well as a few related "four letter words," as a starting point for detailing the underground's embrace of obscenity.

San Francisco-based poet Michael McClure published an exhortation to embrace the word in all its semantic richness in a 1962 essay that appeared in *Kulchur* entitled "Phi Upsilon Kappa."[775] The essay would serve as a manifesto of sorts for similarly inclined writers. It maps underground aesthetic sensibilities in the 1960s by detailing the creative possibilities of inhabiting obscene spaces. As McClure put it in his essay's opening, "Gregory Corso has asked me to join with him in a project to free the word FUCK from its chains and strictures. I leap to make some new freedom."[776] He argued that the strategic aesthetic deployment of "fuck" and other obscenities would foster modes of being liberated from what he understood as the repressive censorial regime of mainstream America.

McClure's essay focused on the physical and psychological impact of censorship. In a move that reflected longstanding underground tendencies towards Manicheanism, he argued that ideologies of obscenity split the world into alienated and unalienated spheres. McClure believed that language was intensely bound to personal identity, that it was through language that individuals understood themselves as distinct physical subjects. He writes, "A man knows *what* he is by how he names his states. If I do not name my condition I am less defined and lack sureness. Speech cannot be censored without loss.

[774] On the history of "fuck" and its use in English-language media, see Sheidlower, "Introduction: About the F-Word."
[775] Michael McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," *Kulchur* 2, no. 8 (Winter 1962): 65–74.
[776] Ibid., 65.

Words are a part of physiology. Lost parts of body are losses of spirit."[777] For McClure, language and even individual words were intensely corporeal. Literary censorship thereby amounted to an act of collective violence done upon the body and the mind. It limited what one could be in all senses of the word. McClure identified concrete sources of this violence, what he called the "obscenity barrier" and "the walls of censorship."[778] He described the "obscenity barrier" as something that "freezes the spirit solid on the side that faces the outer world and shuts up the nascent infinitude of acts and loves on the other," while the behind "the walls of censorship" lay "possibilities that cannot flow into the frozen and known and create new ideals."[779] His metaphorical "barriers" and "walls" demarcate distinct spaces, one censored and thereby oppressive and another that was liberatory, full of possibility and plenitude. The uncensored world was where new modes of being could emerge. This framework maps easily onto existing underground sensibilities about mainstream institutions in that it identifies the realm of the State and its attendant institutions as physically, intellectually, and emotionally alienating. The "obscenity barrier" was a means of halting the sort of expressive practices subterraneans hoped their autonomous institutions could cultivate.

If the terrain of conflict was language, then the means of deconstructing and transgressing the "obscenity barrier" would also be linguistic. McClure admonished readers to deeply embrace the material on the other side of the "obscenity barrier" in

[777] Ibid., 70.
[778] Ibid., 71, 72.
[779] Ibid.

order to open up unalienated modes of being. They had to say "fuck" and other obscene words:

> "FUCK! The word is a mantra. (Sanskrit: *man* is the first syllable of *manana* or thinking. *Tra* is from *trana* or liberation from the *samsara* or phenomenal world. Mantra calls thought freedom forth!) Besides the sexual meaning of *fuck* the barrier against it makes it a mantra. It will call forth. Shout FUCK and break your image up! Say SHIT! Shout CUNT! Say all the Words that are denied to you and make all deep desired acts that are mortal and have perfect meaning for your meat.[780]

McClure takes care to note that the power of these words derives from them being banned. This fact supersedes its corporeal referents: "fuck" is about sex, but it is about a lot more than that. To say it and similar words is to wrench power way from those that crafted the "obscenity barrier" and the "walls of censorship," and to direct that power towards the construction of new modes of expression and being. The essay itself partakes in this practice. With each declaration of "fuck" it gains momentum and its rhythm hastens. Going further, he writes,

> Say FUCK! Say I FUCK! Say FUCK because it is a spirit mantra as is any word that moves and vibrates the chest like a roar. Say any word that returns men to a meaning or names any novel act as vow. Any great swearing. All men are profane and rapturous, wrapped and coiled like one helix inseparable. 'Fuck' is the symbol of hostility and hostility is the counterpart of love.[781]

This is the final prose passage of the 1962 version of the essay, appearing before it breaks off into a brief poem, as if the repetition of "fuck" destabilized the essay and required a new form of expression, a reflexive formal counterpart to the act of bodily reconstitution he imagines accompanies the shouting of obscenities. McClure saw obscenity as a

[780] Emphasis in Source, ibid., 73.
[781] Ibid., 74.

weapon one could repurpose. In descriptively mapping out a theory and strategy around and within the word "fuck," he wrenched power away from the dominant culture that demonized it and imbued it with power in the first place. In a classically subterranean gesture, he inverts dominant attitudes, turning their fear and condemnation of "fuck" into a "fuck you" that others might imitate.

Others did imitate it. McClure's essay charted underground aesthetic impulses of the mid-1960s. In *Kulchur*, McClure noted that the essay was incomplete.[782] The final section of the essay appeared the following year in the eighth issue of Ed Sanders's *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*.[783] The complete version of the essay featured in his 1963 collection *Meat Science Essays*.[784] The additional passages detail various ways and contexts in which one can "say fuck," with increasing attention to the word's sexual connotations. I will discuss his visions of sexuality in the following section, but for now it is worth dwelling upon the connection to Sanders. I have already discussed Sanders in relation to the Mimeo Revolution, but it is important to recognize his subterranean reputation. Underground journalist John Wilcock, for instance, identified him as an "Underground hero," along with McClure and several others.[785] He published widely and dabbled in underground film.[786] His band, The Fugs, named after the euphemism for "fuck" used in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), was relatively

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[782] Ibid.
[783] Michael McClure, "Fuck Essay," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 5, no. 4 (1963): 31–36.
[784] Michael McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," in *Meat Science Essays*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1966), 7–23.
[785] Mel Howard and Thomas King Forcade, eds., *The Underground Reader* (New York: New American Library, 1972).
[786] Sanders details such activities at length in the first chapter of his memoir. See Sanders, *Fug You*, 1–118.

successful throughout the decade, at least for an underground band: they were the first rock band on an independent record label to appear on the Billboard 100.[787] He was a figure fellow subterraneans sought to emulate. The same could be said of *Fuck You*.[788] The magazine exemplifies the political and aesthetic embrace of obscenity McClure proscribed, and illustrates the beginnings of the obscene community.

Like *Blacklist*, *Fuck You* was an important window on to the underground, and representative of how ideas McClure expressed came to animate underground aesthetic practices. Literary critic Daniel Kane calls it "encyclopedic in its embrace of all movements and publishing practices that threatened conventional morality."[789] Though it only lasted for thirteen issues over a period of four years, ultimately folding in 1966, it was notable for the range of contributors and subjects that appeared within it, seemingly capturing the full range of subterranean topics and the milieu's best known figures. Its contributors included beat luminaries like Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orvlovsky, established authors like W. H. Auden and Norman Mailer, literary underground stalwarts like Kirby Congdon and Carole Bergé, and many others. Notably, it publicized the work of queer writers. For instance, it prominently featured the work of Taylor Mead, the

[787] Robert Christgau, "Teach Yourself Fugging," *Village Voice*, February 9, 2002, http://www.villagevoice.com/music/teach-yourself-fugging-6414218.
[788] Scholars often cite *Fuck You* as one of the most scintillating examples of the 1960s literary magazine boom, but analyses of its oppositional impulses rarely goes beyond the title. In that sense, the magazine is strangely understudied. A notable exception to this is literary critic Daniel Kane's excellent account of the magazine, which situates it within New York City's Lower East Side poetry scene. See Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, 64–78.
[789] Ibid., 72.

future star of many of Warhol's underground films.[790] The broad array of writers featured in *Fuck You* left no taboo subject untouched. Drugs were a recurrent topic, with multiple poems and editorial describing the effects of substances like cocaine and heroin.[791] Multiple works explicitly explored an array of sexual practices. For instance, Lenore Kandel's poem "To Fuck with Love" detailed heterosexual sex in graphic detail, while Orlovsky's "Second Sex Experiment or ' ' Recorded Happenings Peter Jerking Allen Off" consisted of a transcript of an audio recording of the author's sexual encounter with partner Ginsberg.[792] The physical and excretory body was a recurrent theme. Issues frequently featured cartoonish drawings of male and female genitalia in various states of arousal. Sanders described the content of one issue as "Spew-writing, outpukes from the lowereast side, stolen poetry pissoff smut, & whole-cream streams of lust and rapine."[793] The third issue featured Penny X's visual "Crotch-Poem," allegedly an exact replica of the poet's bodily discharge.[794] It also veered into deliberately perverse and illegal terrain, including incest and pedophilia.[795]

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[790] Taylor Mead, "Notes from His Diary," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 2, no. 5 (December 1962): 7–8; Taylor Mead, "Crotch Itch in Heaven," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, no. 4 (August 1962): 6; Taylor Mead, "Taylor Mead on Dope," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 3, no. 5 (May 1963): 32–34; Taylor Mead, "My Monthly (A Turgid Monthly Newsletter from Turgid Mead -- Your Europenis Co-Respondent)," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 5, no. 9 (July 1965): 21. On the magazine's support for queer writers, see Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, 67–68.

[791] John Wieners, "Cocaine," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, no. 4 (August 1962): 8; Al Fowler, "Heroin," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 1, no. 5 (December 1962): 7.

[792] Lenore Kandel, "To Fuck With Love," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 1, no. 5 (December 1962): 5; Peter Orlovsky, "Second Sex Experiment or ' ' Recorded Happenings Peter Jerking Allen Off," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 3, no. 5 (May 1963): 6–7.

[793] Ed Sanders, "Notes from Editor," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, no. 4 (August 1962): 2.

[794] Penny X, "Crotch-Poem," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, no. 3 (June 1962): 3.

[795] Al Fowler, "Caroline: An Exercise for Our Cocksman Leader," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 1, no. 5 (December 1962): 10.

One could dismiss Sanders's deliberate, hyperbolic, and at times sophomoric embrace of such material as a juvenile provocation to shock. However, such a dismissal would miss the fact that deliberate provocation was precisely Sanders's goal. It was central to his vision of the underground. He hoped to shock audiences, and cross whatever boundaries the surface world constructed in the name of consolidating an obscene community beneath it. His over-the-top transgressions pointed the way towards that space on the other side of McClure's "obscenity barrier" where new senses of the self might emerge. Sanders positioned *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* within the liberatory and confrontational space McClure claimed saying "fuck" would grant one access to. The magazine's title created this breach, instantly situating contributors and readers within obscenity and the world it signified even before they opened its page. Its carnivalesque contents attested to the vitality and potentialities of the underground, a demonstration that artists could produce almost anything in those spaces marked obscene. In that sense, the magazine documented a specific obscene community consisting of Sander's peers and colleagues. The appearance of prominent subterranean figures of both the 1950s and 1960s within the magazine attests to how this community was already established. Figures like Ginsberg and Orlovsky were already underground, but Sanders let readers know that the space they now inhabited was attuned to the obscene in a way that had not been five years previous. In a sense, his work inverted the framing of *Blacklist*. Rather than declaring, "This community has been declared obscene!" he put forth a community that announced, "Yes, we are obscene!"

Furthermore, *Fuck You* demonstrated how one could say or write "fuck you," an invitation to participate in the community the magazine represented. He wanted readers to join in on what he called a "total assault on the culture." The phrase recurred throughout Sanders's oeuvre. He described it in a 1963 issue of the magazine,

> Let it be known that the Editorial Board Beats off for TOTAL ASSAULT ON THE CULTURE! & PROGRESS ON ALL GUERILLA LOVEFARE LINES! PEACE, DOPE, FREEDOM, ANARCHY! WHEN SOMEONE ZAPS YOU OUT WITH A HATE BEAM, YOU ZAP 'EM BACK WITH LOVE BEAMS! SCORCHED BRAIN POLICIES COUNTERED WITH FLASH FLASH PACIFIST ZAP ZAP GUERILLA LOVE-FARE FREAK BEAMS! DOPE! DEFY THE LAWS!!! SMOKE/SNORT/SHOOT THE GENTLE PHARMAKA! ONWARD! THAT WE GIVE & RESPECT! & FUCK EACH OTHERS APERTURES, GENTLY OF COURSE, & WITH INFINITE LOVE SPRAY! TO THE BARRICADES! TOTAL ASSAULT! PEACE! LOVE! RADIANCE! SPRAY OUT FREAKBEAMS! ONWARD! ONWARD! WE MUST FUCK ONE ANOTHER OR DIE!!![796]

Sander's "total assault" involved the total embrace of the taboo, an act he describes in militaristic terms. Each declarative statement is an invitation to partake in the obscene underground world *Fuck You* invokes, an act that is individually freeing and an important antagonist gesture towards the conventional morality and politics of the surface world.

After all, the magazine was not called *Fuck*, but *Fuck You*. Sanders and his compatriots took aim at specific targets, clearly identifying the State and its attendant institutions, especially the agencies and enforcers of obscenity laws, as the recipients of the magazine's titular invective. As noted in the previous section, Sanders was involved in organizing underground artists against the harassment and arrest of New York City artists. Multiple issues featured a column authored by Nelson Barr called "A Bouquet of

[796] Ed Sanders, "Notes from Editor," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 4, no. 5 (1963): 1.

Fuck Yous," with each featuring a list of individuals or groups that deserved to have the obscenity aimed at them, including the police, the wealthy, political figures, and media institutions[797] Sanders specifically targeted ideologies of obscenity and the figures that enforced them, writing in one editorial, "We are motherfucking tired of the brickout of books, movies, theatre groups, dope freaks, Time Square gobble scenes, poetry readings, night club acts, etc. in New York."[798] He enjoined readers to go on the offensive: "We defy all censors, fuzz, goon squads! We're going to eat at their foundations, weaken them, lessen them, most of all we're going to stir their armored-over repressed psyches with the hot breath of our love, pour hot hardon blood into their pricks, caress their wives & daughters to enter their brains with flares spewing loveliness."[799] Sanders thus positioned the underground, that world opened up by heeding McClure's words, against the entire state, military, and censorial apparatus.

Sanders's work resonated with readers in and outside the underground, suggesting that the obscene community he mapped out was an established and expanding presence. Donald Allen, Diana di Prima, and Congdon were fans.[800] Seymour Krim told Sanders that he "tout[ed] its fresh reality" whenever he could.[801] Julian Beck of The Living Theater told him, "May the reverberation of *Fuck You* and all cause the courts to

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[797] The second issue, for instance, directed them at the "brutal sadists" at the New York Police Department, Nelson Rockefeller for "selling death boxes to the frightened bourgeoisie," the New York Daily News for publishing "simplified sex for morons," and Congolese politician Moise Tshombe for contributing to the death of Patrice Lumumba. See Nelson Barr, "A Bouquet of Fuck Yous Offering #2," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, no. 2 (April 1962): 18.

[798] Ed Sanders, "A Fuck You Position Paper: Resistance Against Goon Squads," *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* 7, no. 5 (September 1964): 1.

[799] Ibid., 3.

[800] Kirby Congdon to Ed Sanders, 27 August 27 1962, Folder 285, Box 11, Ed Sanders Papers.

[801] Seymour Krim to Ed Sanders, May 18, 1965, Folder 317, Box 12, Ed Sanders Papers.

crumble, the gates of the jails to spring open, the state to wither, the people to rise like erections with the desire to love."[802] Alan D. Austin, editor of the Boston-based magazine *Motive*, wrote him in 1962 and praised the magazine, declaring that "You have our undying admiration. Like *Motive*, you too realize that the primary function of art in our time is to cut through the crap which is suffocating us on all sides."[803] Blazek's *Ole* increasingly took on Sanderesque qualities, adopting his hyperbolic rhetoric and comical obsession with capital letters and bodily fluids.[804] His readership, however, was not limited to established underground figures. While well-known within New York's subterranean milieu, *Fuck You* had an international readership that encountered it as a text cloaked in secrecy and criminality. His correspondence reveals that he had readers from all across the United States, Europe, Australia, and India, all of whom expressed interest in *Fuck You*'s political and aesthetic project.[805] As one reader in Queens put it, "After finally deciding months ago that the magazine *Fuck You* was actually just a

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[802] Julian Beck to Ed Sanders, 25 May 1964, Folder 275, Box 11, Ed Sanders Papers.

[803] Alan D. Austin to Ed Sanders, 23 October 1962, Folder 272, Box 11, Ed Sanders Papers.

[804] *Ole*'s sixth issue, for instance, bears the following Sandersesque dedication: "DEDICATED TO ALL POETNIKS, LIFENIKS, & THE MAKING OF POERY INTO A DANGEROUS MEAT-PLASM THAT CLOGS OUR EVERY DEED & SMEARS OUR EVERY THOUGHT." The two were in direct communication. In *Ole*'s second issue, Blazek reports that he sent Sanders a copy of the first issue seeking feedback. He appears to have viewed him as mentor of sorts. See Douglas Blazek, ed., *Ole*, no. 6 (1966); Blazek, "Don't Put This Book Down You Nut Until You Read This Introduction!," 1.

[805] For example, Marryann Broadus of Anchorage, Kentucky wrote to Sanders in the mid-1960s requesting copies of *Fuck You*, noting that references to his magazine in the *Village Voice* piqued her interest. See Marryann Broadus to Ed Sanders, [1964?], Folder 275, Box 11, Ed Sanders Papers. The Ed Sanders Papers features correspondence from multiple countries, including Canada, Switzerland, England, and India. See John Ashworth to Ed Sanders, 7 February 1964, Folder 272, Box 11, Ed Sanders Papers; E. Armstrong to Ed Sanders, 16 February 1968, Folder 272, Box 11, Ed Sanders Papers; Thomas Clark to Ed Sanders, 18 October 1964, Folder 282, Box 11, Ed Sanders Papers; Utpal Basu to Ed Sanders, 16 July 1963, Folder 275, Box 11, Ed Sanders Papers.

cleverly circulated in-joke among the innest of the in, I was pleased to read in the latest *Freak* that it might really exist after all."[806]

Sander's "total assault" was part of an aesthetic movement, a manifestation of the "cultural revolt" that Trocchi called for. It is not surprising then that these obscene aesthetics reflected the gender disparities already present within that revolt. As Kane has demonstrated, Sanders primarily saw his transgressions in linguistic terms, claiming in 1998 that he understood the magazine's shocking contents as "experiments with words rather than experiments in sexuality."[807] This notion points towards the troubling gender politics of these subterraneans' obscene turn. Sanders's claim gestures back to a moment in McClure's essay, when he says "Besides the sexual meaning of *fuck* the barrier against it makes it a mantra."[808] It was "fuck's" status as a "mantra" that signified its power. While McClure argued that saying it freed the body and mind, ironically its power was unconnected to its physical referents. His obscenities are strangely abstract, redirected towards other aspects of physical and social life. In such a framework, Sanders's decision to include works like Penny-X's "Crotch Poem" and Kandel's "To Fuck With Love" in *Fuck You* appear less as assertions of liberated female bodily and sexual activity than as building blocks in Sander's own obscene project. He ends up abstracting his subject matter, instrumentalizing female sexuality and bodies in the service of highlighting the possibilities of obscene life. This tendency was characteristic of the underground writ

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[806] Peter Kacalanos to Ed Sanders, 8 February 1964, Folder 301, Box 12, Ed Sanders Papers. *Freak* was a short-lived mimeographed magazine published by Tom "Tiger Tim" Hawkins out of San Francisco. See T. Hawkins to Ed Sanders, 1965, Folder 304, Box 12, Ed Sanders Papers.
[807] Quoted in Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, 68.
[808] Emphasis in Source, McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," Winter 1962, 73.

large. As performance historian Sally Banes writes of New York's underground scene, "The female Body…was often represented as the subject or theme – the raw materials – of artworks."[809]

These practices are abundantly clear in the work of d. a. levy, a major figure in the 1960s underground.[810] His work channels obscenity in multiple senses. In doing so, he illustrates the spread and impact of underground aesthetics, their conceptual possibilities, and the political limits of the obscene community. levy was a key figure in Cleveland's literary underground, and the city itself was a topic he revisited throughout his work.[811] McClure and Sanders directly influenced him, and he identified them as friends and peers.[812] Sanders later praised him as Cleveland's "hand-printed genius."[813] levy defined himself as a subterranean, jokingly referring to his circle of friends as the

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[809] Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 228.

[810] levy typically stylized his name as d. a. levy. I will follow his lead whenever possible. Similarly, he often used idiosyncratic capitalization, punctuation, and grammar. Where possible, I have maintained his unique writing style. He is an understudied figure in 1960s poetry and publishing. Strangely, academic critics appear to have ignored him. However, artists, fellow poets, and critics working outside scholarly institutions and venues have written extensively about him and his life. See, for instance Fox, *The Living Underground: A Critical Overview*, 15–24; Mike Golden, "Portrait of a Young Man Trying to Eat the Sun," in *The Buddhist Third Class Junkmail Oracle: The Art and Poetry of D. A. Levy*, ed. Mike Golden (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999), 28–94; Smith and Swanberg, *D.A. Levy and the Mimeograph Revolution*. Born in 1948, levy was a key figure in Cleveland's underground poetry community, as well as influential throughout the Midwest. He died in 1968 of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. His death was mourned by poets across the nation. For more on his biography, see Larry Smith, "D. A. Levy: Cleveland's Poet-at-Large," in *D.A. Levy and the Mimeograph Revolution*, ed. Larry Smith and Ingrid Swanberg (Huron, OH: Bottom Dog Press, 2007), 38–55; Golden, "Portrait of a Young Man Trying to Eat the Sun." Golden's essay veers into conspiracy theory when it discusses levy's death, but it nevertheless provides a wealth of material about him.

[811] Smith, "D. A. Levy: Cleveland's Poet-at-Large." levy also identified his friends and comrades as the "underground saints, martyrs, & heroes of clveland." See d. a. levy, *The Marrahwannah Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1966): 25.

[812] In "d. a. levy's Spontaneous Bibliography," a list of works he found important, he included McClure's *Meat Science Essays*. See D.A. Levy, "D. A. Levy's Spontaneous Bibliography," in *Zen Concrete & Etc.*, ed. Ingrid Swanberg (Madison: Ghost Pony Press, 1991), 199.

[813] Ed Sanders, "Hymn to the Mimeograph Revolution" (Jon Beacham/The Brother In Elysium, 2012).

"Underground Thought Police."[814] Those outside the underground recognized him in such terms. For instance, a journalist covering Cleveland's literary scene described his Renegade Press as an "apparition from Dostoevsky's Underground."[815]

Like Sanders and McClure, he had a close relationship to obscenity. As noted previously, he was the target of police harassment. In 1967, he was indicted by a grand jury, arrested, and jailed for possessing and distributing obscene literature. However, even before then levy adopted their ideas and embraced the concept as an aesthetic principle and political-philosophical imperative, replete with its problematic gender politics. Take, for instance, *Farewell the Floating Cunt*, a short book of poetry he published in 1964. The mimeographed work bore an epigraph by Mark Twain: "When angry count four…if still angry swear."[816] The book features four sections. The first consists of a single poem entitled "Fuck." The second, the "Excrement Trilogy" consists of three poems entitled "Shit," "Turd," and "Crap." The third is titled "genital quartet (feminine)" and features four poems: "Snatch," "Cunt," "Twat," and "Pussy." The fourth is a counterpart to the previous section: it is called "genital trilogy (masculine)" and includes three poems entitled "Cock," "Prick," and "Schmuck." Each poem consists of the titular word repeated anywhere between five and nine times, and arranged apparently at random across the page, with words printed horizontally and vertically. Given the attention to the specific words as words and the quote that frames the book, it is clear that levy intended to focus on the words themselves as opposed to their referents: to say them

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[814] Golden, "Portrait of a Young Man Trying to Eat the Sun," 39.
[815] Adelaide Simon, "The Cleveland Scene," *Books*, December 1964.
[816] d. a. levy, *Farewell the Floating Cunt* (Cleveland: Renegade Press, 1964).

was to enact some form of personal catharsis, making a claim about the intellectual and emotional benefits of censored language. In doing so, however, he instrumentalizes and exploits his subject matter: in line with McClure's thinking, his "genital quartet (feminine)" and "genital trilogy (masculine)" are not about genitals, but the prohibition against saying such words. In writing and publishing them, he wields their power in the name of self-actualization, but it is an abstract and redirected power that, in part, rests upon the instrumentalization of female bodies.

Like Sanders, levy mobilized these obscene abstractions against would-be censors and the state that supported them. He elaborated on the concept in 1966 when he published "Hate Rays: You Too Can Help Destroy a Nation," in his mimeo magazine, *The Marrahwannah Quarterly*. He framed the essay as an elaborated version of the ideas found in *Farewell the Floating Cunt*. He writes,

> in a previous renegade publication i quoted Mark Twain, "When angry count four,..if still angry, swear." & I still feel this to hold. Rather than turning anger inward and burning yourself out of ulcers, a few obscenities can cool you off..& the opposite..rather than let yourself suffocate under the pillows of a slow social death..a handfull of 4-letter words dropped at random can set off a chain reaction that will keep you laughingly alive for a long time.[817]

As the title suggests via its subtle invocation of Sander's "total assault on the culture," this moment of catharsis had political in addition to personal value: it was tool in the oppositional cultural arsenal, a weapon as McClure would have it. This was in the context of the prosecution of artists across the United States for using them. His discussion of the Cleveland police department's harassment of local publishers immediately follows his

[817] d. a. levy, "Hate Rays: You Too Can Help Destroy a Nation," *The Marrahwannah Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1966): 22.

own musings on the category itself. Again like McClure, he thought obscene language could cultivate new modes of being, but this was a function of their initial suppression: they are the state's "hate rays" redirected. If obscenity marked that which was outside the idea of the American nation, to wield obscenities within it was to upend its ideological underpinnings. Such was the means of levy's "total assault." However, if this essay is a continuation of the ideas latent in *Farewell*, then it is reasonable to assume that "Hate Rays" inherits the previous work's limits, suggesting that levy did not direct the "you" of the essay's title at everyone: only men, it seems, would take an active role in destroying the nation.

levy refined his ideas about the possibilities of obscenity over the next several years, ultimately going further than McClure and Sanders. He came to understand their obscene embrace in terms of aesthetic form, and mobilized such artistic developments against dominant cultural institutions. In that sense, his later work explicitly synthesized underground critiques of commercial institutions with obscene aesthetics in ways previous figures only hinted at. His turn towards "concrete poetry" exemplifies this.[818] For levy, the mimeograph was not just a means of printing poetry, but an instrument that afforded new modes of expression. For instance, he frequently experimented with mimeograph production processes to produce visual landscapes of text and ink. By the late 1960s, much of his work fell into this terrain. For instance, his "Visualized Prayer to the American God" (1966) series features poems that use dollar signs, cent signs, and

[818] For a summary of the history and characteristics of concrete and visual poetry, see Joe Bray, "Concrete Poetry and Prose," in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale (New York: Routledge, 2012), 298–309.

asterisks to create images of American flags, eagles, and swastikas.[819] His 1967 poem "comment on the acid landscape" is perhaps the most extreme example of such a style. A poetic representation of an acid trip, it features two pages of various phrases and typographical symbols printed atop one another, with text printed horizontally and vertically, enough so that deciphering the words themselves is disorienting. One section of text features the following overlaid with parentheses, asterisks, and short phrases printed backwards:

> ITS MOVED OVER HERE THAT
> STRANGE LANDSCAPE HAS MOVED OVER HERE THAT THAT STRANGE MIND
> MIRROR MOVED OVER LANDSCAPE HAS STRANGE bad trip isn't it better
> mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm- mmmmFREEDOM
> ACID SCENE FIFTH DIMENSIONSAL MOTION.[820]

Such works resist reading as it is conventionally understood. For instance, they could not be featured at a poetry reading: "comment on the acid landscape" could not be spoken. As critic Hugh Fox has written, "Levy was always moving 'off' the page into pure imagery. If he had lived or if he'd had any money, he would have probably ended up in experimental film work."[821]

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[819] d. a. levy, "Visualized Prayer to the American God #1," in *Zen Concrete & Etc.*, ed. Ingrid Swanberg (Madison: Ghost Pony Press, 1991), 130; d. a. levy, "Visualized Prayer to the American God #2," in *Zen Concrete & Etc.*, ed. Ingrid Swanberg (Madison: Ghost Pony Press, 1991), 130; d. a. levy, "Visualized Prayer to the American God #3," in *Zen Concrete & Etc.*, ed. Ingrid Swanberg (Madison: Ghost Pony Press, 1991), 131; d. a. levy, "Visualized Prayer to the American God #4," in *Zen Concrete & Etc.*, ed. Ingrid Swanberg (Madison: Ghost Pony Press, 1991), 131; d. a. levy, "Visualized Prayer to the American God #6," in *The Buddhist Third Class Junkmail Oracle: The Art and Poetry of D. A. Levy*, ed. Mike Golden (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998), 147.

[820] d. a. levy, "Comment on the Acid Landscape," in *Zen Concrete & Etc.*, ed. Ingrid Swanberg (Madison: Ghost Pony Press, 1991), 127.

[821] Fox, *The Living Underground: A Critical Overview*, 19.

levy saw such formal experiments as obscene gestures towards new modes of communication. In a "concrete essay" entitled "Why Concrete?" he made the formal connection between his concrete poems and obscenity explicit. He writes, "What can be more obscene, than refusing to communicate. The establishment (defending nuclear warfare) has refused to listen to warning & prophecies of international chaos. Words as a means of communication (R. I. P) / THINK IT TO EM: Latent Telepaths a (sun) rise."[822] levy's characterization here hinges upon a recognition of the link between obscenity and exteriority: as he understood it, his concrete poems existed outside language and communication, both of which the Cold War political and military apparatus had absorbed and rendered alienating. He made a link between that which was printed "off-page" and "off-stage," to return to Williams's characterization of obscenity. A refusal of one of the most basic forms of communication was the ultimate dive into obscenity. If to say obscenities was to symbolically upend the ideological underpinnings of the nation, to express oneself in forms completely divorced from contemporary systems of meaning-making was to stake a claim to an obscene world outside that nation, one with its own logic and modes of communication. Like Sanders, who hoped his magazine would lead others to join his cause, levy imagined his concrete poems as exercises in thinking obscenely. Hence his subtle call-to-arms: "Latent Telepaths a (sun) rise." It was a call for others to think differently, and from there enter into an unalienated world.

When levy wrote that, he was specifically targeting dominant cultural institutions. He saw such formal obscenities as implicit critiques of dominant cultural institutions, a

[822] d. a. levy, "Why Concrete," *The Marrahwannah Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (1967): 4.

position unaccompanied by any or revision of subterranean masculinism. In "The Para-Concrete Manifesto," he conceptualized his concrete poems in corporeal terms reminiscent of Sanders's editorials in *Fuck You*, linking his work with a militant underground critique of surface institutions of politics, culture, and art:

> Our concrete poems are written to purify our minds & Intestines of all western sophisticated hypocracy apathetic impotent outrages racist-mindfucking white supremacy dung / to liberate ourselves form the decay of the passive dainty assfuck culture of art patrons / to save ourselves from being enshrined with the outher saints martyrs & hero's of The Muck such as Jesus, Nixon, the Pope, president johnson, billy grahmcrackers, the American 'deep image' poets, Dali, Wyeth, Walt Disney, & the princes of distortion (the newspaper reporters).[823]

Here, bodies, sex, ideologies of gender, and poetry intermingle in an antagonistic relationship with the state and the dominant culture. levy suggests that these poems functioned in the same way he previously argued swear words did: they were cathartic; they "purify" minds and bodies of surface-world influences, including aesthetic institutions, well-known artists, and mainstream politics. They pave the way for the new modes of communication his poems gesture towards, an assertion of the necessity of thinking obscenely and inhabiting the community where that was possible. However, by positioning his concrete poems as a response to the "decay of the passive dainty assfuck culture of art patrons," levy marks his obscene embrace as an exercise in heterosexual and masculine vitality. Once again the dive into deviancy serves to reconstitute a very traditional mode of masculinity. As he suggests in the opening sentence of the above passage, concrete poems respond to the impotency of the surface world.

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[823] d.a. levy, "The Para-Concrete Manifesto," in *Zen Concrete & Etc.*, ed. Ingrid Swanberg (Madison: Ghost Pony Press, 1991), 129.

levy's work can be thought of as the culmination of the underground's embrace of obscenity. His work of the late-1960s reflects the development of McClure's and Sanders's ideas in the early portion of the decade. It demonstrates how obscenity not only reframed subterranean content, supplying a matrix of allegedly criminal ideas, words, and acts positioned outside and beneath mainstream American society as seen in works like *Fuck You*, but also offered a way to think. levy treated it as a framework through which new modes of communication could emerge, attacking existing institutions while laying the foundation for an alternative culture. The embrace of obscenity allowed artists to reject all aspects of dominant culture, including and especially established arts institutions. This is why the subtitle of *Fuck You* was *A Magazine of the Arts*: it simultaneously made a claim about the value of obscene material while critiquing the aesthetic pretensions of those that would denounce the underground as obscene. The space outside of the nation that obscenity marked was a space in which that which the state denounced could flourish, and also one in which new forms of aesthetic and political practice might emerge. In other words, it was the domain of Trocchi's "new underground," where alternative modes of being could flourish. This was the value of obscenity to subterraneans, and why they leaned into the concept the same way artists embraced Cold War ideologies of deviancy a decade previous.

However, underground aesthetics remained structured by problematic attitudes about gender and sexuality that had been a part of underground thinking since its first appearance in the immediate postwar era. In embracing allegedly obscene material, subterranean men mobilized a range of transgressive words and images in the name of

gaining entrance to the underground, but they understood the power of those things only insofar as the dominant culture demonized them. It mattered who wielded obscenities, and how they did it. Major figures of the underground, those actively theorizing it after its obscene turn, veered towards exploitive practices of instrumentalization that ultimately pointed the way towards who was and was not permitted on the other side of McClure's "obscenity barrier."

THE POLITICS OF FUCK(ING)

The problematic ways subterraneans wielded obscenity did not mean they automatically subscribed to dominant sexual attitudes. The underground's focus on representing the body and sexuality in transgressive new ways accompanied equally transgressive ideas about sexual practice and identity. This is not surprising, nor a controversial claim. The decades after World War II saw the rise of increasingly permissive sexual attitudes, at least in regards to heterosexuality.[824] The 1960s itself is famously the period of sexual revolution, one that subterraneans might be considered the vanguard of. Many were members of activist groups like the New York League for Sexual Freedom that challenged conventional sexual attitudes, agitated against

[824] Historians John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman describe this as the rise and consolidation of "sexual liberalism." They define this ideology as ""an overlapping set of beliefs that detached sexual activity from the instrumental goal of procreation, affirmed heterosexual pleasure as a value in itself, defined sexual satisfaction as a critical component of personal happiness and successful marriage, and weakened the connections between sexual expression and marriage by providing youth room for some sexual experimentation as preparation for adult status." See John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd Edition (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2012), 241. On the emergence of this ideology, see Ibid., 239–388. Whitney Strub has argued that the battles against obscenity law in the United States should be situated in this context. See Strub, *Obscenity Rules: Roth v. United States and the Long Struggle over Sexual Expression*.

censorship, and advocated for sexual education.[825] As multiple scholars have demonstrated, artists in this milieu theorized new forms of bodily presence, as well as straight and queer sexuality. Banes, for instance, has argued that experimental artists of the early 1960s envisioned what she calls "the effervescent body," a porous body that traversed boundaries and actively intermingled with others in all their racial, sexual, and gustatory dimensions.[826] Similarly, literary critic Loren Glass has described this milieu's rejection of high-brow pretension and tendency towards the scatological, the corporeal, and the sexual as "vulgar modernism."[827] Film theorist Ara Osterweil has argued that film from this milieu ought to be considered a "pornographic avant-garde."[828]

It is, perhaps, controversial to argue that subterranean visions of carnivalesque bodily and sexual activity were a function of their attraction to the obscene. That is, the underground embrace of obscenity was the precondition for their vision of bodily and sexual life: in the underground, new senses of physical connection, intimate and otherwise, could emerge. The body was, after all, the site *sine qua non* of obscenity. It was where "prurient interests" materialized, meaning it was itself obscene, being that which must always be "covered up" in public.[829] If the underground always bore the promise of unrestricted agency, its reorientation around obscenity, an ideology that

[825] The New York League for Sexual Freedom's advisory committee consisted of Julien Beck, Allen Ginsberg, Paul Krasner, Tuli Kupferberg, Ed Sanders, Diane di Prima, and John Wilcock. See Michael Francis Itkin, "New York League for Sexual Freedom," Press Release, 1964, Folder 306, Box 12, Ed Sanders Papers. For more on the New York League for Sexual Freedom and similar groups, see David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 41–53.
[826] Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 189–233.
[827] Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, 120–28.
[828] Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film*.
[829] Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 232.

effectively made a fetish out of sexual activity, then the new forms of agency promised by the obscene community would be sexual in nature. This was a defining characteristic of the underground of the 1960s.

This is where the problematic gender politics of many subterraneans really start to matter. Within the underground, men frequently authored these visions of new bodily and sexual being, often excluding women from the liberatory realm they envisioned. That is not to say their efforts were without value, or that the parameters set by obscenity were totalizing: the underground's vision of sexuality was legitimately liberatory, and provided an alternative to the world of normative sexual, marital, and romantic ideologies, as well as decoupling and reconfiguring the relationships between them. However, it foregrounds how their vision of sexuality stemmed from their will-to-obscenity. Women, of course, were not absent. They offered up new visions of bodily and sexual life that frequently rivaled those of their male counterparts in their commitments to upending the values of the aboveground world.

In examining underground ideologies of the body and sexuality, it is worth first reframing their embrace of obscenity in terms of the closely aligned concept of pornography, meaning sexually explicit representations of the body. The underground's connections to pornography extended beyond censors labeling them in such terms. For instance, in the 1950s, the writings of members of the hip underground like Bob Kaufman and Jack Kerouac appeared in "girlie magazines" like *Swank* and *Escapade*, as well as

the recently founded *Playboy*.[830] While the appearance of hip and beat writing in what scholars today would call "softcore" pornography was likely an attempt by such magazines to cash in on a new cultural phenomenon, it did link that milieu with pornography in the same way that the "Howl Trial" linked it with obscenity.[831] Only a few years later in the early 1960s, many subterraneans were enthusiastic advocates of the pornographic. For instance, in *Kulchur*, critic Donald Phelps argued that pornography stirred creativity, that it was "probably better equipped to help the conscious and sub-conscious liberate and cross-pollinate each other, than any other creative expression except religion."[832] Phelps's essay was, in part, a response to an essay by Paul Goodman,

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[830] For instance, Beat anthologist Seymour Krim and *Village Voice* editor Bill Manville curated a section of the monthly magazine *Swank* that was dedicated to beat and hip literature, what one of the magazine's staff writers described as "sincere protest writing and art." Krim and Manville wrote in the section's inaugural editorial, "We will use this section from issue on for what is fast-moving, iconoclastic, rich, riotous, illuminating, and in on the modern beat." See Sid Bernard, "Swank Sounds Off," *Swank*, November 1960, 4; Seymour Krim and Bill Manville, "The Swinging Modern Scene," *Swank*, November 1960, 20. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Norman Mailer, Bob Kauffman, and Lord Buckley would go on to appear in the column. See Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "Loud Prayer," *Swank*, May 1961; Norman Mailer, "Four Poems," *Swank*, May 1961; Bob Kaufman, "Abomunist Manifesto," *Swank*, May 1961; Lord Buckley, "The Hipster's Nero," *Swank*, May 1961. Jack Kerouac appeared in *Escapade* and in *Playboy*. See Jack Kerouac, "The Beginning of Bop," *Escapade*, April 1959; Jack Kerouac, "The Origins of the Beat Generation," *Playboy*, June 1959.

[831] For instance, in 1968, Canyon Cinema employee Robert Pike complained about this association. He writes, "Ever since New American Cinema became synonymous in the minds of moviegoers with sex-oriented films such as Flaming Creatures, Confessions of a Black Mother Succuba, Cosmic Ray, and Chelsea Girls, the interest in this type of underground cinema has been on the upswing." See Robert Pike, "Notes from the Creative Film Society: Pros and Cons of Theatrical Bookings," in *Canyon Cinema: Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 102.

[832] Phelps goes on to suggest that a religious pornography, or a pornographic religion, is unlikely to appear anytime soon. See Donald Phelps, "A Second Look at Pornography," *Kulchur*, no. 3 (1961): 71–72. Phelps was a critic who frequently appeared in underground publications. A collection of his essays published in 1969 described him as "a critic and editor whose underground reputation has grown over the last ten years to a stature impossible to ignore." See Donald Phelps, *Covering Ground: Essays for Now* (New York: Croton Press, 1969).

who made similar claims about the imperative to not censor pornography.[833] Mekas praised the artistic possibilities of pornographic films, what he called "Hoboken movies," writing, "Compared to any Hollywood sex movie, Hoboken movies are pure cinema."[834] Members of the Sexual Freedom League of New York later argued that the visual and textual representation of sexuality could promote healthy sexual attitudes and practices, as well as social harmony writ large.[835] Sanders himself described some of his publications as pornographic.[836]

Subterraneans valued pornography because it pointed towards new types of bodily and sexual experience. This was a direct response to what they saw as the bodily and sexual impact of the alienating confines of mainstream society. For them, sexuality could only flourish underground. A return to McClure's "Phi Upsilon Kappa" clarifies this matter and demonstrates how this was part and parcel of the underground's embrace of obscenity. It crystalizes underground visions of bodily and sexual possibility. As discussed in the previous section, he understood language and corporeality as being intricately connected. In the extended version of his essay published in 1963, McClure

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[833] Paul Goodman, "Pornography, Art, and Censorship," *Commentary* 31, no. 3 (March 1, 1961): 203–12. Goodman took issue with Phelps's claims in the following issue of *Kulchur*. See Paul Goodman, "A Comment," *Kulchur*, no. 4 (1961): 3–5.

[834] Jonas Mekas, "September 7, 1961: On the Classical Beauty of Hoboken (Blue) Movies," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), 33.

[835] They write, "Sexual writings and pictures also allow for the harmless release in fantasy of such anti-social desires such as sadism and forcible rape….There is even more value in pornography appealing to healthy sexual desires (both heterosexual and homosexual) which assists persons deprived of sex pleasures to masturbate." See New York League of Sexual Freedom, "We Defend Pornography" (New York, 1964), Folder 448, Box 14, Ed Sanders Papers.

[836] For instance, in *Bugger: An Anthology*, a collection of poems dedicated to exploring heterosexual and homosexual anal intercourse, Sanders described his Fuck You Press as "a name of distinction representing 3 years of quality printing and aggressive innocence in the pornography industry." See Ed Sanders, ed., *Bugger: An Anthology* (New York: Fuck You Press, 1964), n.p.

drew concrete links between the saying of "fuck" and sexual activity. Saying "fuck" not only freed the spiritual, emotional, and physical self, but the sexual self as well. As he put it in the essay's final extended exhortation to shout obscene words, "Say FUCK, say FUCK, say FUCK, say anything that opens to acts."[837] Here, McClure immediately moves to a discussion of the differences between "fucking," and "copulation" and "intercourse," clarifying which "acts" he had in mind:

> Is there any more personal creative act that fucking? Fuck does not mean merely the act of copulation but all ramifications, doings, and movements that give sexual delight to the spiritbeast who is lonely and cold and in need of touch and warmth in his separateness. He joins with a woman to make a citadelheavenjungle of conjoined pleasure clearing the accumulated weight from sense. He gives ease and openness by aiding another. Is there a more *personal* and *creative* gesture? When copulation is unearthly it is fucking. Fuck is the old deep word. *Copulation* and *intercourse* are words made up from a dead language. To have intercourse or to copulate is not to fuck. To fuck is to give moments of ease and warmth to another and to accept the same from a loved one, and to join bodies and clear the spirit of its heaviness.[838]

For McClure, "intercourse" and "fucking" denote alienated and unalienated sexualities. The latter is expansive, creative, and generative. It is deeply individual, but also a means by which individuals connect with others. As Osterweil puts it, it was "a utopic commingling in which Eros merged with ethos."[839] McClure more clearly defines the alienated sexuality of "intercourse" in the following paragraph: "Men who say *copulate* and *intercourse* feel removed from their bodies. They use those words to create an illusion of objectivity – as if they look down on the doings of beasts. And don't they *fuck*? I would rather fuck with my meat body than have intercourse and watch it with my

[837] McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," 1966, 19.
[838] Emphasis in Source, ibid., 19–20.
[839] Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film*, 164.

mind."[840] "Intercourse" and "copulation" are sanitized abstractions, the antithesis of McClure's ideal corporeal-linguistic intermingling brought about by the saying of things like "fuck." Words like "intercourse" serve a censorial function, and consequently do violence to one's body, mind, and sexuality. They describe sex without bodies. The two sets of terms – "copulation" and "intercourse, and "fucking" – lay on opposite sides of what he called the "obscenity barrier" and the "walls of censorship."[841]

In this framework, the depiction of unbridled sexuality wields specific types of social and political power. In other words, there was power in the pornographic, a subset of the obscene realm McClure called for artists to embrace, setting the stage for underground visions of new forms of bodily and sexual life. Given the relationship between language and body in his argument, speaking of "fucking" and engaging in it are transgressive in the same way: speaking (or representing more generally) the words and doing the deeds differ in degree, not in kind; one heralds the other. This becomes clear in the closing moments of the essay, when the saying of "fuck" and "fucking" blur together:

> Oh, do not cast down the desire for FUCK or hide it in the veil and chain of lying censorship and thus dilute your spirit. Fucking is great sexual pleasure, is warm and soft and sleek and silent. Fucking is dear and sweet and nestling. Fucking is personal and silent. Fucking is a mighty roar. FUCK breaks down the walls that hold men to a single vision.[842]

His declarations of "FUCK" (invoked as a noun) frame his descriptions of "fucking" (invoked as an act), as if the former contains and makes possible the latter. If the 1962 version of "Phi Upsilon Kappa" was a call-to-arms in the name of obscenity, in this

[840] McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," 1966, 20.
[841] McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," Winter 1962, 71, 72.
[842] McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," 1966, 22.

version, he also exhorts others to produce to pornography. Producing it was an assault on alienating institution and thereby a precondition for new modes of sexual being.

McClure's claims here rest upon a series of contradictions that reveal the underground's problematic assumptions about gender and female sexuality. On the one hand, he offers a radically expansive vision of sexual activity in the context of the times. He notes that "fucking" describes "all ramifications, doings, and movements that give sexual delight to the spiritbeast."[843] It is an act oriented towards pleasure and collectivity, rather than instrumentalized in the name of procreation, though he does not exclude the latter from his formulation.[844] On the other hand, he clearly identifies "fucking" as a masculine and heterosexual activity. Posing a series of hypothetical questions, he writes, "I will intercourse you? Or is the man who is a real man never to say *I will fuck you. . . ?* Is he to keep his desires secret and tamed and withering behind a wall of censorship and silence? Must he disrespect the desire that make his being? Does a man desire and dream of copulation? Or doesn't our sleeping body dream of fuck."[845] His expansive sexuality appears to be the strict purview of a traditional and aggressive masculinity. The universalizing gesture found in the shift from "he" to "our" reveals his assumed audience of men, and consequently who he saw as capable of wielding "fuck" and discussing "fucking."

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[843] Emphasis in Source, ibid., 19–20.
[844] D'Emilio and Freedman argue that this was the central component of "sexual liberalism," which became increasingly dominant over the course of the twentieth century. See D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 241.
[845] McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," 1966, 21.

McClure's vision on the power and possibility of "fucking" is the bodily corollary of his vision of the power of saying "fuck." It is subject to the same logic: if the first edition of his essay set the stage for women's bodies to be objectified as images mobilized to grant men entrance to the underground, then its second edition utilizes women's bodies as sexual objects that can be possessed in the underground. Within his essay, women function less as individuals than as objects that men might use to demonstrate new forms of bodily and sexual being. He mentions women only twice in the essay. First, when he notes that his first use of "fuck as a mantra to break a barrier" was when he could not have sex with a particular, unnamed woman: "Wanting a woman I could not have, though she was willing, my repressed desire made my sense blur with the smoke of anguish…My desire was not obscene but the frustration of my impulse and my weakness put my want behind a barrier."[846] That barrier collapses when he lets fly a string of expletives, suggesting that the deconstruction of the "obscenity barrier" primarily enables the freeing of male desire, and by consequence sexual access to women. This vision of underground activity is as limited as that of figures discussed in the previous chapter who linked underground being with unbridled masculine sexual mobility. McClure mentions women again in the closing moments of the essay: "All women who are mothers fuck."[847] Though likely intended as a reminder of the ubiquity of "fucking" in American life, its reference to motherhood undermines his vision of an

[846] Ibid., 19.
[847] Ibid., 22.

expansive, non-reproductive sexuality, confining women to a traditional sexual and gender role.

McClure's vision is profoundly limited, but significantly transgressive works emerged and circulated within an underground shaped by such ideas. Some of the best known works that emerged out of the underground explored queerness to new degrees from the point of view of gay men. For instance, playwrights like Caffe Cino regular Doric Wilson and Play-House of the Ridiculous writer-in-residence Charles Ludlam explored gay identities on underground stages in ways that would not be permitted on Broadway.[848] The most famous example here is of course Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963), an ode to Hollywood B-Movies, the actress Maria Montez, and the complete collapse of normative gender and sexual identities that stars a handful of androgynously costumed men and women. *Flaming Creatures* was and still is one of the most discussed films to emerge out of the 1960s underground. Its most notable scene is an orgy filmed on a Manhattan rooftop where "men in drag seemingly rape a woman, drag queens engage in acts of lesbianism, and all characters behave in blissful oblivion of traditional alignments of anatomy and gender roles," as film scholar Juan A. Suárez describes it.[849] This scene typically received the most attention by critics and censors at the time of its release. It embodies the twin impulses of McClure's pornographic underground. On the one hand, it offers a radically expansive vision of human sexuality, one that dissolves

[848] On Wilson's and Ludlam's work, see Bottoms, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*, 49–62, 230–33.

[849] Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, & Superstars*, 185. Though Suarez uses the word "seemingly" to describe the depiction of the rape, it was frequently read in such terms. As he notes, the Senate Committee tasked with investigating the film's obscenity saw it in such terms. Susan Sontag also described it in such terms in her praise of the film. See Ibid., 184–185; Sontag, "Jack Smith's Flaming Creatures," 227.

socially constructed and biological divisions in the name of collective pleasure. On the other, its utopic vision of sexuality relies upon the aestheticization of violence against a woman.[850] The unnamed woman is not the beneficiary of the collapse of any and all social norms as much as she is the terrain upon which that collapse is enacted. The degree to which it conformed to McClure's vision likely contributed to its popularity. Radically queer as it was, in some respects it shared multiple underground assumptions about gender.

The obscene community inherited the exclusive homosociality of the hip underground. However, it was not totalizing. Take, for instance, the women published in *Fuck You*. Just because Sanders's published *Fuck You*, it does not mean that the works by female authors within it were automatically subsumed into his project. He might have seen them as abstractions, but that does not mean that they were. Kandel's "To Fuck With Love," which appeared in a 1962 issue of *Fuck You*, illustrates this. The poem narrated a woman's sexual encounter with a man from beginning until end in graphic detail. It is an explicit celebration of female desire and sexual satisfaction. As the narrator declares, "YES YES YES this is it this is what I wanted this/ beautiful."[851] In many ways, it perfectly expresses underground attitudes about sexuality: it concludes, "My GOD the worship that it is to fuck!" echoing the religious fervor with McClure described the act.[852]

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[850] Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, & Superstars*, 185.

[851] Kandel, "To Fuck With Love."

[852] This poem would receive further attention when it appeared in Kandel's 1965 book of poetry, *The Love Book*. She described the book as "holy erotica." San Francisco police raided City Lights Bookstore in 1965 (they appeared to have made a habit of it) and seized *The Love Book* as pornography. When the case was brought to trial, the court ruled that it was without redeeming social merit, and thereby obscene. On

Kandel's work is important because it demonstrates how women working within the underground actively exploited the possibilities of pornography and obscenity in their own work and on their own terms. *Fuck You* is representative of underground tendencies in this sense: it operated according to deeply problematic assumptions, but its sincere insistence on being obscene created a space for others to explore the same material from different angles. Its ethical rejection of mainstream publishing outlets created a platform for those individuals actively excluded from said outlets. This does not exculpate male subterraneans for their gender politics, but it does highlight that underground potential usually exceeded its practice. Although the underground was a masculine defined space, women continually challenged such ideologies by working within that space to narrate and theorize new forms of bodily and sexual experience from their perspective, acts that ultimately redefined the possibilities of underground life by pushing the boundaries of the obscene community even further than their male counterparts. Even though masculinist ideologies shaped the underground of the 1960s, its principled rejection of conventional institutions, subjects, and forms enabled things its masculine gatekeepers could not imagine.

Consider the work of Barbara Rubin. Rubin is an understudied figure, but she played a major role New York City's underground community.[853] She worked at the Film-Makers' Cooperative and was an ever-present figure at underground events,

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Kandel's work, see Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution*, 279–85.

[853] Osterweil provides the most comprehensive account of Rubin's life and work. Her work has been indispensable to my thinking here. See Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film*, 23–55.

working as an "organizer, agitator, and innovator" in the name of subterranea.[854] She was close with underground stalwarts like Ginsberg, Mekas, and Sanders, who dedicated a book of poems to her in 1964. His *Bugger: An Anthology* bore the following dedication beneath its table of contents: "This issue is dedicated to the Brilliant Goddess of Buggery Barbara Rubin who in earlier metempsychotic emanations was Aphrodite Kallipygos and Venus Cloacina."[855] Such a dedication suggests her position within the underground was not only a factor of her personal relationships, but of her commitment to the same values. Her work exemplifies how female subterraneans pushed masculinist visions of underground possibility beyond their patriarchal limits.

Rubin's only film, *Christmas on Earth* (1963), is pornographic and obscene in all subterranean senses of the word. It is, as Osterweil puts it, perhaps "the most sexually explicit film of the 1960s."[856] Plotless, it features five figures – one woman and four men, all white – engaged in various heterosexual and homosexual acts, often in extreme close-up, over the course of its thirty minute length.[857] It is also formally complex, entering into the formal terrain of obscenity theorized by levy: it is a split-screen film featuring two reels projected on top of one another. Rubin gave strict orders for its projection:

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[854] Ibid., 25.

[855] Sanders, *Bugger: An Anthology*, n.p. Aprhodite Kallipygos is an ancient Greek statue whose name translates to "Aphrodite of the Beautiful Buttocks." Venus Cloacina was a name given to the goddess associated with the ancient Roman sewer system. While the comparison Sanders draws between Rubin and these figures is typical of his brand of humor, it also foregrounds the problematic dimensions of his underground vision: he compares her to an aesthetic object and a mythological figure.

[856] Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film*, 23.

[857] In 1964, Mekas claimed that the female character was played by actress and filmmaker Naomi Levine. She is best known for starring in the films of Jack Smith and Andy Warhol. See Jonas Mekas, "December, 24, 1964: An Interview with Naomi Levine," in *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 168–70.

> the film is on two reels. Both reels must be projected simultaneously. Two projectors are needed. The first projector fills the screen; the image of the second projector is approximately 1/3 smaller and fills only the middle of the screen, superimposing on the first image. This can be done either by using different lenses or by placing one projector closer to the screen. It doesn't matter which reel is on which projector. During the screening, the projectionist is asked to play with color changes by holding colored filters in front of the lens of one or the other projector, or both. Moreover, the film has neither head nor tail – it can be projected either way.[858]

As multiple scholars have argued, the film's unique projection technique could be read as an analogue to sexual intercourse itself, especially when its images of body parts in various physical states blend and merge together, figuratively penetrating one another.[859] In other words, it incorporates the pornographic at the level of form, disrupting conventional modes of screening and watching films. In a sense, it perfectly synthesizes the multiple ways underground artists theorized and expressed their pornographic embrace.

This deep commitment to the pornographic engenders an expansive vision of human sexuality which we can understand by reference to McClure's vision of "fucking." The various readily identifiable sex acts that feature prominently throughout the film can certainly be described as the "ramifications, doings, and movements that give sexual delight to the spiritbeast."[860] Furthermore, via the film's innumerable superimposed images of individuals engaged in these sex acts, as well of images of genitals, faces, and various other body parts in as many physical states as one can imagine, the film expands the horizons of possible sexual "doings and movements." This is a function of the film's

[858] Quoted in Dixon, *The Exploding Eye: A Re-Visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema*, 137.
[859] Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 215; James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 316–17.
[860] McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," 1966, 19.

distinct formal properties, as well of Rubin's instructions for projection. If projectionists followed Rubin's instructions, then each screening would be unique, the product of the projectionist's personal creative decisions, which would produce a new set of visual associations that stage new forms of bodily contact.[861] It visually collapses any and all boundaries between bodies, pushing them towards a fluid state of reciprocal pleasure and fun. After all, while aggressively sexual, *Christmas on Earth* is humorous at times, such as when a female performer contorts her stomach into a smile or when the cast waves goodbye at the end of one of the film's reels. *Christmas on Earth* not only depicts expansive sexual activities, but pushes the boundaries of what counts as sexual activity, creating new ones via its screening practices. After all, McClure claimed that "fucking" was "personal" and "creative."[862] Each screening of the film staged the act of "fucking," forging a creative relationship between not only the images on celluloid, but between Rubin, projectionist, and audience.

However, Rubin expands McClure's vision of sexuality, actively undermining its masculinist assumptions in two key senses. First, the film resists any impulse to privilege male sexual desire. As Osterweil notes, "Rubin treats male sexual climax as only one of the myriad possibilities of bodily ecstasy. Instead of culminating the erotic explorations in *Christmas on Earth*, Rubin insists upon the continuity rather than the cessation of sexual pleasure implied by orgasm, immediately cutting to images of undiminished

[861] To add another dimension of spontaneity, Rubin intended for screening to be accompanied by a live radio soundtrack. On the film's use of sound and music, see Lucas Hilderbrand, "Sex Out of Sync: Christmas on Earth's and Couch's Queer Sound Tracks," *Camera Obscura* 28, no. 2 (2013): 45–75.
[862] McClure, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," 1966, 19.

sexual plenitude."[863] If McClure went underground to liberate male desire, Rubin's entrance to the same space liberated desire wholesale, pushing heterosexual and homosexual male and female desire into new spheres of being and activity. Second, this film certainly relishes in the objectification of bodies, both male and female, instrumentalizing them, in part, as a function of its turn towards pornography. However, they are not abstractions: the continual stream of images of people engaged in carnal acts renders that impossible. If Sanders's positioned *Fuck You* as a set of experiments with words, then *Christmas on Earth* was an experiment with images and bodies. It is, after all, a document of an actually occurring group sex act.

That is not to say that Rubin's vision of uninhibited carnality is fully liberatory. It is firmly ensconced within subterranean logics, which always involve a degree of problematic appropriation. Rubin's film takes part in these practices by deploying racial masquerade, a variation on the appropriation of black styles seen within the hip underground of the previous decade. The film's female character frequently appears in a form of blackface: black make-up covers nearly her entire body. Furthermore, many of her actions within the film take on a ritualistic appearance. For instance, at one point she and the male characters ornately pose in an arrangement reminiscent of a religious ceremony. Banes argues that the film's depiction of racial masquerade and its staging of exotic otherness were essential to its take on sexuality: it was the precondition for its liberatory sexual politics, for the female character's blackface permits her to be "sexually

[863] Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film*, 35.

available in a way that white women are not supposed to be."[864] The while male characters occasionally appear in full-bodied white make up, heightening their whiteness. The film's use of blackface might thereby be read as a type of inversion of racist tropes about black male sexuality: if white supremacists imagined that black men sought unbridled sexual access to white women, then *Christmas on Earth* depicts a blackfaced white woman with unbridled sexual access to white men (who also had unbridled sexual access to each other).

Ironically, the film's racism foregrounds its subterranean connections, demonstrating how Rubin was partaking in the same sort of practices her male counterparts were. Her vision of sexuality and of the body, however, managed to be far more liberatory and far more obscene, as if she took McClure's ideas about "fucking" seriously and pushed them past their gendered limits. If underground sensibilities hinge on a type of symbolic inversion, affixing a positive to what those with power decry as negative (in this case, the obscene), then Rubin's work manages to be subversive: it works to partially overthrow rather than rearrange dominant ideologies, a function not just of her subject position but of a conscious attempt to rethink desire. Her work is but one example of a small, but aesthetically and politically significant trend within the underground of the mid-1960s. In film, one could easily situate Naomi Levine's *Jaremula* (1965) or Carollee Schneeman's *Fuses* (1968) in this tradition of underground gender revisionism: Levine's film explored masturbation as a "rite of sexual performance and self-actualization," and Schneeman's featured her and partner James Tenney having

[864] Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 223–24.

sexual intercourse in an exploration of new forms of heterosexual desire.[865] These strands of underground filmmaking were not dominant in the 1960s, but their presence is significant in that they challenged prevailing visions of the underground from within, and raised larger questions about the body and sexuality that scholars and critics continue to grapple with.[866] The impulses they channeled would erupt militantly at the decade's end, when significant feminist critiques of underground politics and aesthetics emerged, a subterranean corollary to the appearance of radical feminism across the United States.[867]

UNDERGROUNDED

When Bosley Crowther denounced the popular ascendance of the underground in the pages of the *New York Times* in the last month of 1966, he was lamenting the milieu's expansion and refusal to fade away. If the 1950s was the era in which the underground coalesced into a recognizable world, the 1960s was when its borders expanded, its population grew, and those recent migrants built it up in unprecedented ways. The appearance of a range of underground forms in the era – the underground publishing and

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[865] Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Cinema at the Margins* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 100–101. Levine's films barely receive a footnote in scholarly works on underground cinema, largely a function of their inaccessibility today. She described her film thusly, "Is an exercise in film editing. It is the repetitive use of 3 and 4 frame cuts spliced into 5 and 6 frame cuts, countering in subject to the sound track, which is a visual word poem in white images, created by Steve Durkee, and recorded by me from a reading by Steve, read for me alone in his church. The first half: the white images are in shadow and gray on the track. The visual images are varied sexual habits intercut with a baby about to be breast fed. At last the sound images break into sun and visually we are blessed with a shy but real kiss by Mimi and Red Grooms. The visual bridge between the two scenes, the shadow, and the sun is made by shots, very pale, of the ice lace on the perimeter of a snow field, which the sun finally melts, as it breaks through on the track." See Naomi Levine, "Jeremulu," in *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue No. 5* (New York: New American Cinema Group, 1971), 203. On Schneeman's work, see Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film*, 157–66; Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 217.

[866] For instance, Schneeman's work appears frequently in queer studies, sexuality studies, and related disciplines.

[867] Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance*, 184–215; Paula Rabinowitz, "Medium Uncool: Women Shoot Back; Feminism, Film and 1968 -- A Curious Documentary," *Science and Society* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 72–98.

poetry of the Mimeograph Revolution, the underground film of the New American Cinema, the underground performances of happenings, and the underground theater of off-off-Broadway – was a result of artists taking the hip underground's claims to exteriority seriously, seeing it as an opportunity to do work on their own terms. Their modus operandi was cultural autonomy: the underground was where they could develop and explore forms and content that the cultural institutions of mainstream America prohibited. This was a material break: they forged their own institutions of art by establishing presses, film distributors, performance venues, and theaters. It was not just that more people were interested in underground ideas. It was that there were more places they could go to develop and circulate new ideas.

The underground, however, could never stay wholly open. As a concept fundamentally constructed within dominant culture, one that hinges on the inversion rather than the subversion of dominant values, its vision of exteriority was always bound to that of the world it resisted. Subterraneans continued to value criminality and dominant ideologies of criminality still established the conditions of possibility for underground activities, but the regulatory regimes of American culture were changing. Ideologies of obscenity, which emphasized bodily and sexual representation, assumed the place communist deviancy once held in the American imaginary: it marked a new space imagined as exterior to the nation. Underground artists were increasingly prosecuted for obscenity, reconstituting the underground such that by the end of the decade it could be understood as the "obscene community." This meant that underground artists embraced obscenity as a political and aesthetic principle, increasingly defining the spaces outside

art and the content of their prefigurative politics in terms of the obscene. In this incarnation of the underground, artists wielded obscenities like weapons, using them to carve out autonomous spaces in which the new modes of being in the world long attributed to underground life could flourish. Here, they reversed the demonization of non-normative sexual practices contained within the ideology of obscenity, imaging expansive modes of sexual and bodily being in their obscene world.

There was a politics to this obscene sojourn. It mattered who embraced obscenity, and how they did it. As with the hip underground and their predecessors, the underground remained a primarily masculine space, a political limit upon the radical inclusiveness its ideals suggested. Its most visible exponents and theorists remained men who maintained their control over the discursive construction of the underground. They remained tied to dominant patriarchal attitudes, another holdover from the sphere they claimed to have left and further evidence of their position within rather than outside dominant culture. Within the imaginary of the obscene community, women functioned less as people than as objects that men used to demonstrate their newly found liberation. However, the underground was never fixed: as an imaginary, it was mutable, capable of being repurposed and revised. The dive into obscenity outside mainstream institutions meant that women could operate in new ways and cast new visions of sexuality that rivaled their male peers in their expansiveness and their pornographic qualities.

This period of expansion would raise a series of questions that subterraneans would need to respond to as the decade neared its end. Subterranea's growth meant that its sensibilities resonated with people across the nation. As the texts explored in this

chapter demonstrate, it was national in scope: there were pockets of underground activity in cities with well-known bohemian enclaves like New York City and San Francisco, but there were also subterranean outposts in places like Ohio, New Mexico, Illinois, and Louisiana. As the underground grew, so did its institutions and, in order to stay afloat, they needed to adopt the methods, practices, and sometimes the money of the surface world they purported to flee, controversial acts within the underground that drew the ire of purists and led many to become disaffected from the term itself. As I explore in the following chapter, those in the underground needed to carefully reconsider their relationship to the mainstream, but more importantly, they needed to reconsider their relationship to the idea of "being underground" itself.

Chapter 5 – An End to Hostilities: New Relationships between the Underground and the Establishment

"underground adj. Unsanctioned by prevailing social attitudes; anti-Establishment (see ESTABLISHMENT). For a long time the public was unaware of the subcultures of drug takers, hippies, and sexual swingers (see SWINGER). Their existence was kept so quiet that they were called underground. They have influenced mainstream society a great deal; the growth of hair by hippies, beads by the mystic religious sects, clothes by homosexuals and hippies, advertising art by psychedelic art, and the moral code of today by all these groups, to mention a few of the more obvious aspects…Many underground activities are now successful moneymaking ventures." – Eugene E. Landy, Ph.D., 1971.[868]

In April of 1969, drama critic John Lahr published an article in *Evergreen Review* that proclaimed "the end of the underground."[869] Lahr was not a subterranean, though he followed the underground closely and championed it as *Evergreen Review*'s resident drama critic. As he understood it, the obscene community imagined by figures like Michael McClure, Ed Sanders, and Barbara Rubin had won acceptance from the world it initially opposed. Though subterraneans rejected dominant cultural institutions, those same institutions had begun singing the praises of the underground. At times, they even actively supported it.[870] Lahr noted that several years after the emergence of off-off-Broadway theater, "The National Council for the Arts gives over $100,000 a year for experimental theater, the Rockefeller Foundation awards grants to 'new playwrights,'

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[868] Landy, *The Underground Dictionary*, 191.

[869] John Lahr, "The End of the Underground," *Evergreen Review* 13, no. 6 (April 1969): 45–47, 82–84.

[870] Ironically, Lahr facilitated this process. He produced criticism that won him accolades from the very institutions that members of the obscene community sought to escape, helping facilitate the processes he lamented in his essay. Lahr received the George Jean Nathan Drama Criticism Award for 1968-1969 for drama criticism featured in *Evergreen Review*. The award committee specifically cited his 1969 essay "In Search of a New Mythology" as exemplary. The George Jean Nathan Drama Criticism Award is sponsored by Cornell University. On his award, see "Previous Award Winners," *George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism*, accessed January 18, 2016, http://english.arts.cornell.edu/awards/nathan/previous.html.

most of whom necessarily emerge from the Underground."[871] Lahr suggested "the Establishment and the Underground" had converged and were now were "bound together by similar pleasures (rock, grass) and dyspepsia over Vietnam, national politics, and the race question."[872] The underground had even become popular: "The once arcane, isolated Underground became public spectacle – recreated, talked about, analyzed, and finally made available to the mass. And in that curious American way, idealism cohabited with Big Business."[873] Surprising subterraneans and squares alike, the underground had become linked with the forces of American capitalism, nullifying its radical potential and insuring the underground community and the ideas that animated it could nestle comfortably within the surface world it claimed to reject. Convinced that irrevocable change had occurred, Lahr concluded, "The Underground dies slowly. Old sights and sounds will linger; but the ruling romantic passion will have moved on. How will it end? Perhaps on the pages of *Vogue* or the Late Night News or at a New School Seminar. It may be that the Underground's mixed parentage will make it weak, and finally ineffective."[874]

By the late 1960s, the idea of the "end of the underground" was becoming common within subterranean circles. Artists, intellectuals, and activists that initially found its claims to cultural autonomy appealing were becoming increasingly skeptical. They doubted the liberating possibilities of obscenity. For many, it seemed impossible to

[871] Lahr, "The End of the Underground," 47.
[872] Ibid., 45.
[873] Ibid., 46.
[874] Ibid., 83–84.

sustain any claims to radical exteriority after a decade of profound growth and expanding influence. Subterraneans had begun cooperating, forming national organizations like the Committee of Small Press Editors and Publishers (COSMEP), the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS), and the Liberation News Service (LNS) that responded to the financial and logistical needs of underground artists, writers, and publishers. Such organizations forged ties with institutions many subterraneans denounced, arguing that expansion required compromise, especially in the face of severe state repression and the financial difficulties of sustaining cultural enterprises in the aggressively capitalist United States. Many subterraneans welcomed these developments, seeing an opportunity for financial stability, but others denounced them, claiming that they undermined the principles that had animated the underground for over a decade. Such relationships reconfigured the idea of the underground, positioning it *within*, rather than outside, what was by then commonly described as "the establishment," the confluence of cultural and political institutions that dominated American social life. For hardliners, the underground was never meant to be a niche in the market, but a world unto its own. Such hopes faded away when subterraneans staked claims in the aboveground world.

The heightened political tensions of the era expedited the underground's end. In response to continued American military escalation in Vietnam, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., increased student unrest on college campuses, and the rise of militant organizations like the Black Panther Party many became dissatisfied with the prefigurative and culturally-oriented politics long associated within the underground. As the underground grew, it became increasingly aligned with various social movements,

including the Civil Rights Movement, the Student Movement and revolutionary nationalisms, what was collectively known as "the Movement."[875] For instance, Jerry Rubin of the Youth International Party, otherwise known as the Yippies, linked his politics with that of the underground: "The Yippie is not busy working within the system or trying to explain his actions to the Establishment or the middle-class mentality. He is too concerned with creating a clear alternative, an underground, an opposition. He is involved in a cultural revolution."[876] Others denounced such policies as insufficient to the task of ending the Vietnam War and changing American political-economic structures, ultimately rejecting the prefigurative politics that had characterized subterranean political life since the 1950s in favor of militancy geared towards the seizure of political, economic, and cultural power. "Underground" came to be associated with the at times violent militancy of groups like the Weather Underground Organization.

By the mid-1970s, "the underground" had for all intents and purposes faded away. The term itself did not disappear, but it was deployed differently. It no longer described a coherent community with a shared political and aesthetic sensibility premised on various modes of criminality. Rather, as Lahr suggested in his article, its use migrated. It came to describe a subsection of the establishment, a niche within the world of the surface without the hostility or criminality long associated with the imagined space. In order to trace this process of redefinition and reposition, I will examine several institutions affiliated with the underground in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I begin by analyzing

[875] Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee*.
[876] Jerry Rubin, "Rubin Raps: The Year of the Yippees," *Berkeley Barb*, February 16, 1968, 4.

Grove Press's attempts in the late 1960s to establish itself as the arbiter of underground culture, specifically focusing on its "Join the Underground" advertising campaign, which explicitly conceived of the underground as a marketing niche. Next, I turn to COSMEP, an organization formed in 1968 in response to the financial difficulties of operating independent publishing houses. Through COSMEP, the literary underground expanded, but became closely aligned with state and federal organizations, a point of fierce debate between older subterraneans committed to underground ideals and a new generation of poets and publishers fearful that their literary community would collapse in the absence of state support. I conclude by examining underground newspapers, perhaps the dominant underground cultural form of the late 1960s, specifically focusing on UPS and LNS. I argue that such organizations functioned similarly to COSMEP – they centralized disparate national communities and facilitated new relationships with mainstream publishing outlets. However, as nodal points in the national underground, UPS and LNS became sites of intensified ideological conflict over the political relevance of the underground, a conflict that fractured the community and made its entrance to the mainstream of American culture all the more easy.

This chapter does not tell a story of simple co-option. I am not interested in repeating what historian Rick Perlstein has called the "declension hypothesis," the popular vision of the 1960s wherein joyous youthful rebellion was commodified by the "the establishment" it opposed.[877] There is certainly truth in this account. Hip did become

[877] Rick Perlstein, "Who Owns the Sixties? The Opening of a Scholarly Generation Gap," *Lingua Franca*, no. 6 (June 1996): 32.

an official capitalist style and a great number of capitalists exploited underground subjects and themes: they had done so since the cultural underground first reared its head. Nonetheless, as historians Thomas Frank and Fred Turner have demonstrated, this vision ignores the already counterculturally minded nature of American business culture in the 1960s, as well as the already business-minded nature of many within the so-called counterculture during the same time.[878] The collapse of the underground as a singular community and movement was the result of well-meaning subterraneans and allies working to expand and sustain their clandestine corner of the cultural world. In doing so, they pushed the community's ideological contradictions to its limits and transformed the underground from within. In a sense, they were victims of their own success. The underground's growth made it impossible to ignore its reliance upon the culture it opposed. However, underground promises of unrestricted and authentic creative activity depended upon not recognizing such connections. Consequently, allegiance to the underground faded. The community it previously sustained persisted, though in altered form, relating to the American sites of cultural and political power differently.

LOW COST OF ENTRY

In Chandler Brossard's 1952 novel *Who Walk in Darkness*, the main characters encounter a man named Russell Goodwin at one of their favorite bars. He is an account executive at an advertising agency who lives uptown, in the "square" part of New York

[878] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*; Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (University Of Chicago Press, 2008). For a similar argument, see Daniel Worden, "Neoliberal Style: Alex Haley, Hunter S. Thompson, and Countercultures," *American Literature* 87, no. 4 (December 2015): 799–823.

City that stood in stark contrast to the hip downtown world of Greenwich Village, where the novel's characters live. They recognize that Goodwin is a wealthy cultural tourist seeking adventure and let him buy them drinks, granting him momentary access to the underground scene just as long as he buys them scotch-and-sodas. Max Glazer, the novel's quintessential "underground man" sizes Goodwin up immediately, and accuses him of "buying in" to their world, a comment that makes his friends uncomfortable but not one they disagree with.[879] Once Goodwin demonstrates that he can handle Glazer's mockery, the night progresses without incident. Later in the novel, central character Blake Williams notes that Goodwin was "square": "buying in" did not work; for these white hipsters, you could not purchase your way into the underground.[880]

This moment in Brossard's novel illustrates a longstanding belief about the underground by its inhabitants. Since the postwar era, subterraneans claimed to inhabit a space outside the market. Of course, such figures were necessarily connected to the market they claimed to avoid, but by remaining tied to their own institutions, they could maintain the illusion of autonomy. If one could purchase one's way into the underground, it meant that the underground was subject to the same logic as the market, and was thereby not radically separate from it. This was part of the reason so many subterraneans decried the mass appropriation of underground styles as inauthentic and why it stoked anxiety among them: it shattered the illusion of their exteriority by making clear their connection to broader political-economic structures. As seen in the case of Goodwin, the

[879] Brossard, *Who Walk in Darkness*, 74, 76. For more on the novel's vision of the underground, see Chapter 3 in this dissertation.
[880] Ibid., 125.

attempt to "buy in" marked one as an outsider unwilling to meaningfully contribute to the underground community. You were what the underground press of the late 1960s called a "culture vulture," interested only in scavenging subterranea.[881]

While subterraneans were worried that the mainstream was readily co-opting their identity in the mid-to-late 1960s, some of the larger institutions affiliated with the underground began suggesting that one could buy one's way into this deviant and obscene sphere. Chief among these was Barney Rosset's New York City-based Grove Press. Grove Press had been a major supporter of underground artists and writers, but it was no mimeo-based press: it was a large corporation with national distribution, albeit one smaller than well-known publishers like Random House. Ironically, Grove was part of the world its readers sought to escape. It thereby occupied a strange gray area between the underground and the establishment, keeping one foot in each sphere. Though for most of its existence it worked to support the former, it made several overtures to the latter in the name of expanding and sustaining itself. In doing so it helped reconfigure the underground's relationship to the capitalist market, bringing it closer to the mainstream its inhabitants hoped to avoid. This section traces this history, detailing Grove's role in the emergence of the underground and how it began proclaiming one could "Join the Underground" for the low-cost of a magazine subscription, firmly positioning the underground within the market rather than against it.

At first glance, this seems surprising given that Grove Press was a major source of support and exposure for the underground throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[882] Arguably,

[881] Table of Contents, *Liberation News Service*, no. 228 (January 24, 1970): 1.

the underground would not have spread beyond a few small communities of disaffected white hipsters in New York and San Francisco without it. After purchasing Grove in 1951, publisher Barney Rosset committed it to publishing eccentric, experimental, and transgressive texts that would provide much of the raw material for subterranean beliefs. Rosset was not some opportunist hoping to profit off of transgressive and sensational books. His reasons were primarily political and social.[883] He had long been interested in fomenting a cultural revolution. Though not a subterranean per se, he shared their worldview. As he later claimed, "I came equipped with a certain built-in objection to higher authority."[884] In the 1950s, Grove began publishing European modernist texts that became incredibly important to the burgeoning underground scene, including work by Jean Genet and Antonin Artaud. In 1957, it began publishing *Evergreen Review*, a nationally-distributed quarterly journal that featured the underground's most prominent writers and poets. Its second issue was devoted to "The San Francisco Scene," and was the first national journal to cover Beat writers. It featured work by Kenneth Rexroth, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Michael McClure, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac, who had yet to appear in print in the United States.[885] Grove would go on to publish multiple works by Kerouac, including *The Subterraneans* (1958), *Dr. Sax* (1959), *Mexico City*

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[882] On Grove Press's history, see Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Henry S. Sommerville, "Commerce and Culture in the Career of the Permanent Innovative Press: New Directions, Grove Press, and George S. Braziller Inc." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Rochester, 2009); Brian McCord, "An American Avant-Garde: Grove Press, 1951-1966" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 2002).

[883] Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, 3.

[884] He claimed to have founded a newspaper in the eighth graded called *Anti-Everything*. Barney Rosset, "On Publishing," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 30, 58.

[885] See Barney Rosset, ed., *Evergreen Review Reader: 1957-1966* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011).

Blues (1959), *Lonesome Traveler* (1960), and *Satori in Paris* (1965). Excerpts from Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book* appeared in *Evergreen Review* in the late 1950s before Grove published the full novel in 1960.[886] It published Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* the same year. Grove ensured that underground-minded texts could circulate, fostering the development of the underground's national community.

Grove's relationship to the underground was a function of shared philosophy. It espoused underground ideology throughout the 1950s and 1960s and fought many of the same battles that independent artists did. Like those subterraneans that founded independent presses, Rosset rejected many of the values and standards of mainstream publishing houses. He saw himself as a "combat publisher" actively working outside the domain of the literary establishment to challenge the boundaries of the socially permissibly.[887] For instance, despite disliking Abbie Hoffman's politics, he reportedly distributed Hoffman's *Steal this Book* (1970) solely because Random House refused to do so.[888] Rosset believed he had an ethical obligation to publish works that others would not, later describing publishers like himself as "foot soldiers in the struggle against hypocrisy

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[886] Alexander Trocchi, "From 'Cain's Book,'" *Evergreen Review* 1, no. 3 (1958): 48–74.

[887] John Oakes, "Barney Rosset and the Art of Combat Publishing: An Interview," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 19–57.

[888] As Rosset said in a 1997 interview, "Abbie brought us *Steal This Book* because, though Random House had been publishing him and were happy to have him as an author, they wouldn't publish *Steal This Book*. I made a point to never look at that book. I never opened it. To me, if Random House wouldn't publish it, that was enough—we would do it. We arranged with him that he'd publish it himself and we would distribute it. There was a moral imperative for us to do something because here was a guy fighting for the things that we believed in, and he was being censored by his publisher." See Ken Jordan, "Barney Rosset, The Art of Publishing No. 2," *Paris Review*, Winter 1997, http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1187/the-art-of-publishing-no-2-barney-rosset.

and oppression."[889] Like members of the "obscene community," this brought him into conflict with the state, fighting multiple court battles over the publishing and distribution of allegedly obscene works.[890] In 1959, Grove published an unexpurgated version of D.H. Laurence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1929), leading the United States Post Office to seize all copies sent through the mail. Rosset sued the state of New York and won the right to publish the book. When Grove published Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) in 1961, various states charged booksellers possessing it with distributing obscene materials. Rosset supported challenges to each charge in court.[891] Grove's publication of William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* in 1962 resulted in the novel being banned in Boston and Los Angeles under similar statutes. These legal decisions, however, were overruled in 1966, paving the way for Grove to publish increasingly controversial pornographic texts like Pauline Réage's novel about sexual domination, *The Story of O* (1954, Grove Press edition published in 1971).

Rosset's Grove Press, however, sat uneasily among most other subterranean institutions, a fact that lies at the root of its later treatment of "the underground" as a marketing niche. It was not a culturally autonomous institution that relied upon an artisanal mode of production like the mimeograph-based presses that flourished in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Though it is often grouped with publications by presses like Ed Sander's Fuck You Press, *Evergreen Review* was no *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the*

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[889] Rosset, "On Publishing," 59.
[890] On Grove Press's anticensorship activities, see Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, 101–44.
[891] On the history of these court battles, see Earl R. Hutchison, *Tropic of Cancer on Trial: A Case History of Censorship* (New York: Grove Press, 1969).

Arts.[892] The latter was mimeographed on construction paper and stapled together in Sanders's kitchen, while the former was professionally edited and printed by a private company. That is not to say *Fuck You* was better in terms of content or vice versa, but it is to say that they were produced under very different conditions and possessed very different relationships to the capitalist market. Gilbert Sorrentino, who worked as an editor for Grove between 1965 and 1970, claimed that "Grove, in an odd way…was a trade publisher with the spirit of a little magazine or small press."[893] This was central to its underground appeal and its ability to publish underground authors: its financial resources enabled it to do things that small presses could not. As Sorrentino put it, "Grove actively sought materials which most other publishers would run in panic from, and then *had the means where by acquire and publish and distribute them*. That was the main ingredient – money."[894]

Grove thereby occupied an interstitial space between the underground and the aboveground world. While sympathetic to and supportive of the former, it operated according to the rules of the latter to a degree and scope that other underground institutions did not. This fact enabled their support of the underground in the first place. Sustainability was always a concern: Grove needed to turn a profit, and this guided many

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[892] Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, for instance, include Grove Press and *Evergreen Review* in their bibliographic account of the Mimeograph Revolution. See Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, eds., "Grove Press," in *A Secret Location On The Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (New York: Granary Books, 1998), 100–102; Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, eds., "Evergreen Review," in *A Secret Location On The Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (New York: Granary Books, 1998), 103.

[893] S. E. Gontarski, "Working at Grove: An Interview with Gilbert Sorrentino," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 10, no. 3 (Winter 1990): 97.

[894] Emphasis in source, ibid., 97–98.

of Rosset's decisions.[895] In the early 1960s, it hovered close to bankruptcy.[896] For instance, according to publishing historian Henry Sommerville, Rosset entered into a deal with Dell Publishing to avoid being bought up by a larger corporation, something that was happening to many small- and medium-sized publishers at the time.[897] As part of the deal, Grove controlled all editorial decisions. As a testament to the Rosset's convictions, Grove dropped the deal with Dell when they refused to distribute *Tropic of Cancer*. [898]

Despite Grove's close relationship to the world of the surface, many within the underground saw the company as an important ally. McClure, for instance, attributed the underground's growth over the 1950s and 1960s directly to the publication of *Evergreen Review*'s San Francisco-themed issue. He claimed that though its publication was a "surfacing" of a community that otherwise preferred to stay hidden, "it encouraged the underground," avoiding the distortion that inevitably happens with an insular community receives broad attention: "So often when something surfaces, it tends to destroy the underground. The surfacing of something can do away with the subsurface, whereas *Evergreen Review* sprang generously."[899] As Summerville argues, readers flocked to their books because they clearly rejected established tastes and values.[900] For subterraneans, Grove was the exception to their anti-establishment vision. It was a publishing house able

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[895] In his later years, Rosset described his younger self as a "struggling capitalist." See Rosset, "On Publishing," 58.
[896] Sommerville, "Commerce and Culture in the Career of the Permanent Innovative Press: New Directions, Grove Press, and George S. Braziller Inc.," 342.
[897] Ibid., 337.
[898] Ibid.
[899] S.E. Gontarski, "An Interview with Michael McClure," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 10, no. 3 (Winter 1990): 118–19.
[900] Sommerville, "Commerce and Culture in the Career of the Permanent Innovative Press: New Directions, Grove Press, and George S. Braziller Inc.," 351–52.

to maintain its integrity within the otherwise alienating confines of aboveground America, a factor of Rosset's distinct take on politics and publishing practices, as well as his financial ability to support them. After all, the underground's critique of commodified cultural works and practices was fundamentally romantic as opposed to materialist. As seen in the previous chapter, the critiques made by figures like Kirby Congdon and Douglas Blazek focused on the lack of authorial control the culture industries afforded artists, not on exploitive relationships within the culture industries or their role in constructing hegemonic discourses.[901] Within this framework, a large private company was perfectly acceptable assuming it was operating according to subterranean values. As Sorrentino, former editor of little magazine *Kulchur*, put it, "If I or [Robert] Creeley or LeRoi Jones or Jonathan Williams had been possessed of a publishing house and a few million dollars, we could have published a list much better than Grove's. That is not, certainly, to denigrate Grove – it is to Grove's credit that it was open to suggestions, was curious, was daring."[902] Since Grove did not sacrifice its values, it was acceptable to subterraneans.

However, Grove's relationship to the underground changed in the latter half of the 1960s as the institution grew, ultimately alienating its supporters. The various controversies over censorship and obscenity propelled the publishing house into

[901] There certainly were more Marxist wings within the underground of the early and mid-1960s, more so as the decade progressed, but it was not a dominant political perspective at this point in time. For an example of such a Marxist critique of the culture industries, see Benjamin Piekut's discussion of Henry Flynt's work and activism. See Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 65–101.
[902] Gontarski, "Working at Grove: An Interview with Gilbert Sorrentino," 98.

profitability.[903] Rosset hoped to capitalize off these controversies and expand Grove's reach. He did so by exploiting Grove's underground credibility. If before, Grove had provided the raw materials for an underground actively defining itself, in the late 1960s it sought to define the underground in public discourse, laying claim to the milieu they had previously supported as their own, effectively crowning itself as an underground leader to exploit the alleged luridness of subterranean subject matter. Grove Press linked its public identity with the underground itself, repositioning it as a concept within the market subterraneans sought to escape by suggesting that one could buy their way into it for the cost of a Grove magazine subscription.

Grove's "Join the Underground" advertising campaign spearheaded this process. The advertising campaign was linked to the development of Grove's Evergreen Club, a book-of-the-month club they founded in hopes that it would expand readership and Grove's market share. To join, one need only subscribe to *Evergreen Review*. In return, members received a free book and a subscription to *Evergreen Club News*, a newsletter that featured reviews and information about Grove's catalogue. As part of the campaign, full-page ads appeared in well-known publications most subterraneans would have identified as members of the establishment, including the *New York Times*, *Esquire*, *Ramparts*, *Playboy*, *New Republic*, the *New York Review of Books*, and the *Village*

[903] Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, 193.

Voice.[904] Ads also appeared in the New York City subway system. All featured the slogan "Join the Underground" or some variation thereof, and appeared between 1966 and 1967.

The underground invoked in these advertisements hued closely to that imagined by members of the obscene community of the mid-1960s. First and foremost, they framed the underground as illicit and adventurous. As one ad put it, "Join the Underground. Whisper Evergreen to your newsdealer. If he doesn't have it, raise your voice."[905] Another featured the text, "Join the Underground. You have nothing to lose but your sleep," with the accompanying caption, "We warn you. Underground literature is strong stuff. It can keep you up at nights – reading and thinking. But if you can take it, if you're adult, literate and adventurous, then keep reading."[906] Their underground was culturally broad, encompassing the range of forms that appeared under the subterranean banner. A two-page ad with the title, "Guerilla Warfare: There's a New Strategy in the Underground" campaign proclaimed, "The culture wing is taking over with a battle style all its own. Like a small band of guerillas, they hit and run with slashing spontaneous poems, quick committed journalism, underground films, propaganda wrapped in folk-rock music, and savage satire unleashed from Off-Broadway launching sites."[907] These ads often invoked pornography in the same masculinist terms that appeared in mimeographed magazines. Some ads proclaimed "For Adults Only" and others boasted

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[904] Ibid., 130.
[905] "Samuel Beckett Is Now Appearing at Your Local Newsstand," Display Ad, *New York Times*, January 21, 1966, 27.
[906] "Join the Underground. You Have Nothing to Lose But Your Sleep," Display Ad, *New York Times*, September 18, 1966, 412.
[907] "Guerilla Warfare: New Strategy of the Underground," Display Ad, *New York Times*, March 19, 1967, BR20.

that "Evergreen has been called everything from pure pornography to pure delight."[908] Some ads presented this "adult only" space as one men could enter for easy sexual access to women, reiterating longstanding subterranean patriarchal attitudes. One ad that ran in the *New York Times* in early 1967 featured an image of a woman with the accompanying text, "Dear Sirs: Are there any single fella's in the Underground."[909]

Grove's underground, however, did not extend beyond any figures that did not appear in their publishing catalogue. They effectively laid claim to the underground as their own, equating it with the book-of-the-month club they hoped to develop. This was a conscious attempt to officially brand Evergreen not as part of or as a supporter of the underground, but as its institutional embodiment. Advertisements in the "Join the Underground" campaign specifically equated the underground with Grove Press. To do this, they first invoked their long history of supporting underground artists. Ads in 1966 claimed,

> If you're over 21; if you've grown up with the underground writers of the fifties and sixties who've reshaped the literary landscape; if you want to share in the new freedoms that book and magazine publishers are winning in courts, then keep reading. You're one of us. Grove Press and *Evergreen Review* invite you to join with a group of like-minded readers in a unique club which keeps you in touch with the best writing of our era.[910]

A year later, Grove began using the ad campaign to equate their brand with the underground as whole. One ad proclaimed, "In the world of books, the Underground is synonymous with Grove Press and *Evergreen Review*. It was Grove that publicized

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[908] "For Adults Only," Display Ad, *New York Times*, February 13, 1966, 283; "Is It True What They're Saying About Us?," Display Ad, *New York Times*, August 1965, BR27.
[909] "Dear Sirs: Are There Any Single Fella's in the Underground?," Display Ad, *New York Times*, January 8, 1965, 300.
[910] "For Adults Only," Display Ad, *New York Times*, February 5, 1966, 26.

writers such as Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and William Burroughs. It was also Grove that started the bold, provocative, and pioneering magazine, *Evergreen.*"[911] Such claims reared their heads in the pages of *Evergreen Review* itself, which in 1967 began featuring a column entitled "Notes from the Underground." Rosset saw it as an "anti-establishment" version of the *New Yorker*'s "Talk of the Town" Column.[912] Lasting until 1971, the column featured short articles about underground subjects, including theatrical performances, drag queens, books, and pornography.[913] When the underground became more intensely political, it followed suit, featuring articles on black power, the New Left, gay liberation, and global revolutionary movements.[914] Such ads and columns position Grove as the underground's gatekeeper, effectively stamping its brand on the range of practices within the imagined space.

Grove's advertising campaign was significant for two reasons. First, it reflects the degree to which "the underground" became an influential space within the capitalist market. Underground iconography and styles had long circulated in mainstream American popular culture, ever since the idea of hip and the Beats became a national phenomenon in the 1950s. However, in the late 1960s, "the underground" came to

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911 "Dear Sirs: Are There Any Single Fella's in the Underground?," 300.
912 John Nathan, *Living Carelessly in Tokyo and Elsewhere: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 113.
913 John Nathan, "Notes from the Underground," *Evergreen Review* 11, no. 45 (February 1967): 7–16; John Nathan, "Notes from the Underground," *Evergreen Review* 47, no. 11 (June 1967): 19–21; Seymour Krim, "Notes from the Underground: Maverick Head-Kick," *Evergreen Review* 11, no. 48 (August 1967): 19–20; Parker Tyler, "Notes from Underground: Relativity – A Cosmic Dream," *Evergreen Review* 11, no. 48 (August 1967): 21–22; Robert Coover, "Notes from Underground: The First Annual Congress of the High Church of Hard Core," *Evergreen Review* 14, no. 89 (May 1971): 16, 74.
914 Jud James, "Notes from the Underground," *Evergreen Review* 12, no. 57 (October 1968): 18–19, 92–94; Leo Skir, "Notes from the Underground," *Evergreen Review* 13, no. 63 (February 1969): 22–23, 66; Dotson Rader, "Notes from the Underground: All the Sad Young Men," *Evergreen Review* 14, no. 84 (November 1970): 18–20, 74–79; John Rossen, "Notes from Underground: Revolutionary Nationalism and the American Left," *Evergreen Review* 15, no. 91 (July 1971): 18–19, 60–61.

describe a section of the market, a niche, a process that Grove helped inaugurate via this campaign. Literary critic and historian Loren Glass writes that Grove "almost single-handedly transformed the term 'underground' into a legitimate market niche for adults in the second half of the 1960s."[915] If before, the underground denoted a particular community of artists that produced works outside the established system of cultural production and exchange, Grove's campaign constructed it as a group of consumers with shared tastes. Entering the underground became as easy as buying the right product. To access it and the new modes of being it promised one need only to purchase Grove products. That is why ads bore slogans like, "How can you lose? Fill out the Coupon and welcome to the Underground" and "Evergreen Review; Your Ticket to the Underground."[916] Grove presented the underground not as separate from the establishment, but as a space within it, meaning one could "buy into it." By all accounts, the campaign was successful, attesting to the crystallization of this marketing niche: many individuals unaffiliated with the underground "bought in." In 1966, Grove editor Richard Seaver told fellow employee Harry Braverman, "the full page advertisement in the *New York Times* last Sunday is going to produce at least 1500 members – an unheard of response."[917] That year, *Evergreen Review* circulation jumped from fifty-four thousand

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[915] Glass's observation here is astute. However, he does not situate this claim in relation to the history of the underground as a community or a concept. See Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, 129.
[916] "Join the Underground. You Have Nothing to Lose But Your Sleep," 412; "Guerilla Warfare: New Strategy of the Underground," BR20.
[917] Quoted in Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, 130.

to ninety-thousand.[918] In 1967, Grove became a publicly traded corporation. It soon expanded into film distribution, and bought a theater in New York City.

Second, it was significant that Grove spearheaded this process. The company, now a corporation, was not that far removed from the underground community. As mentioned it above, it was an active supporter of it. Though not ensconced within it, figures like Rosset did not need to "buy in": he effectively had a free pass to move in and out of underground circles. As former staffers have attested, Grove's office often appeared to function as a subterranean hangout.[919] When Grove reconfigured the underground as a marketing niche, they were not operating as a group of outsiders actively seeking the latest trend to exploit and move on but as allies seeking to expand the operation that many argued made the underground possible. In doing so, already existent ties between it and the establishment were brought to the forefront. By all accounts, Rosset remained committed to publishing transgressive texts, a fact attested to by Grove's growing interest in publishing and distributing pornographic texts in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Grove's overtures to the establishment were successful, but alienated Grove's underground constituency. In the midst of its period of growth, many in the underground

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[918] Ibid.

[919] As Sorrentino recalls, "We had many strange people suddenly appearing at Grove, some of them, bewilderedly, off the streets, drunk or stoned, in no sense aware of their surroundings; but many more were unpublished authors, huge manuscripts in hand, demanding an editor who would read this thing in a day or two, and still others furious because their manuscripts had been rejected….Then, of course, we had God only knows how many unexpected emissaries from the outer fringes of the sub-sub-culture, who would arrive at Grove with 'ideas' for books, mostly because they'd read some piece in *Evergreen* on flagellation or bestiality, or one of Barney Rosset's beloved books of Victorian Pornography." See Gontarski, "Working at Grove: An Interview with Gilbert Sorrentino," 100.

began denouncing it as part of the establishment. Critic Charles Guiliano, for instance, wrote that "Grove Press often gets Muckraking confused with Smutraking. They publish all the way-out things like Che's literature on a strictly profit motive."[920] Grove author John Rechy, author of the 1963 novel of queer hustling *City of Night*, began suspecting that Grove's interest in his work was "more commercial than artistic."[921] In 1970, a group of women led by activist and former Grove employee Robin Morgan occupied Grove's offices in protest of the sexism of its pornographic titles and what they saw as its anti-union attitudes. Rosset called the police, and the women were arrested, a decision that drew the ire of many employees and those in the underground. As underground journalist Karen Kearns put it in an article that appeared two days after the occupation, "'Groovy' Grove Press operates in the same Stone Age as the Establishment it vilifies."[922] Prominent New Leftist Carl Ogsleby saw Grove's actions as a betrayal of their antiestablishment ideas.[923]

Grove had always treaded a thin line between underground respectability and aboveground marketability. In veering towards the latter in the name of expansion, it alienated what was effectively its base. Ironically, however, it ultimately prefaced the direction underground institutions were heading in the 1970s. These once autonomous institutions embraced various aspects of the world they rejected in the name of expanding

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[920] Charles Giuliano, "The Latest in New Wave Cinema," *Liberation News Service*, no. 112 (October 18, 1968): 10.
[921] Sommerville, "Commerce and Culture in the Career of the Permanent Innovative Press: New Directions, Grove Press, and George S. Braziller Inc.," 365.
[922] Karen Kearns, "Grove Press: Crimes Against Women," *Liberation News Service*, no. 248 (April 1, 1970): 1.
[923] For more on the response to Morgan's "takeover," see Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, 193–215.

their influence and supporting their community. Grove perhaps made this transition first because of its interstitial relationship between the underground and the establishment. The consequences of this transition were also prophetic. Grove's growth was relatively short-lived. By the early 1970s, it was no longer turning a profit. *Evergreen Review* ceased publication in 1973. The corporation encountered multiple cash-flow problems and could not sustain most of its new investments, and eventually had to sell them off. Facing multiple debts, Rosset sold Grove in 1985, and its new owners fired him as editor-in-chief a year later. It persisted throughout the following decades, but in very different form and in a very different relationship to the bohemian milieu that it had once helped foster. Its best years were behind it, and it would not be such an influential force again. This would prove true of other underground institutions, which would integrate into the mainstream world and abandon many of the ideals that sparked their emergence.

HANGING BY A THREAD OR A GOVERNMENT GRANT

In 1973, the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM) estimated that there "were about a thousand literary, noncommercial magazines" in the United States.[924] CCLM was a New York city-based organization formed in 1967 at the suggestion of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to support what they saw as an unsupported literary scene. By "literary, noncommercial magazine," they meant what many previously described as the literary underground, that community of artisanal and independent publishers forged within the Mimeograph Revolution. The Mimeograph Revolution

[924] Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, "CCLMP History," March 11, 2011, https://www.clmp.org/about/history.html; CCLM, "CCLM," in *The Publish-It-Yourself Handbook*, ed. Bill Henderson (Yonkers: The Pushcart Press, 1973), 295.

likely produced more than one thousand magazines. Many appeared and circulated surreptitiously, and in such small numbers that they will forever escape archives, libraries, and historians. They were scattered and tied to regional communities. Most lasted only a few issues. Publishing a literary magazine or operating a small press was difficult. Many small presses folded for lack of resources and distribution. Even the most famous ones operated on budgets so thin their future was always in doubt. *Fuck You*, for instance, only lasted thirteen issues over three years. In the CCLM report that featured their one thousand magazine estimate, they claimed that though all of these magazines were very different, they shared a common a problem: "how to stay alive."[925] Poet, publisher, and early Fluxus artist Dick Higgins put it more directly: "NOBODY MAKES MONEY ON BOOKS!"[926]

This was not news to underground publishers. By 1973, publishers and presses in the literary underground had been trying for several years to rectify this situation. Their solution was to unify so they could promote each other's work, facilitate the distribution of small press publications to bookstores, and locate other sources of financial support. In short, they hoped to expand their reach so as to sustain their community. The organization they formed was the Committee for Small Press Editors and Publishers, more commonly known as COSMEP. COSMEP was an important institution to emerge out of the underground of the 1960s, one that literary scholars have largely ignored.[927] It

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[925] CCLM, "CCLM," 295.

[926] Dick Higgins, "Some Cautions," in *The Publish-It-Yourself Handbook*, ed. Bill Henderson (Yonkers: The Pushcart Press, 1973), 286.

[927] Little magazines published in the latter half of the twentieth century are largely understudied. For instance, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, an otherwise comprehensive

helped consolidate ties within the disparate community of the literary underground, serving as a central organization that formalized the relationships between publishers all across the nation. It found sources of funding, including from government sponsored organizations like the CCLM. In doing so, it moved away from longstanding underground ideals in the name of maintaining their community. This section details COSMEP's history, its connection to the literary underground, and explores how it transformed. It pays particular attention to two sets of controversies within COSMEP regarding funding and the organization's relationship to the state. Long time underground publishers opposed their decision to solicit funds from CCLM, arguing that it marked them as complicit with the state and all it represented. Similar debates occurred shortly thereafter, but this time members did not argue about whether or not they should receive state support. They debated how much support they should receive. These controversies demonstrate how the animating ideals of the literary underground were changing. Its sharp hostility to dominant cultural and political institutions was fading. As with Grove Press's vision of the underground, the literary underground now functioned as a niche, as a space within the Establishment rather than outside it.

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collection, halts its coverage of American magazines in 1960. See Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds., *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 2 (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). The few scholarly texts that focus on this subject rarely mention COSMEP. For instance, neither Steven Clay and Rodney Phillip's bibliography of the mimeograph revolution, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (1998), nor Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz's recent collection of essays, *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America* (2015), make any reference to the organization. See Clay and Phillips, *A Secret Location On The Lower East Side*; Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz, eds., *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

COSMEP developed out of the subterranean publishing community forged within the Mimeograph Revolution.[928] In that sense, we can consider it the institutional representation of the literary underground, as a microcosm of sorts of the underground publishing scene as it stood in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was formed in 1968 after Jerry Burns, Len Fulton, and several others called for a conference of small publishers in Berkeley, California. The conference organizers hoped to gather a large number of small publishers together so they could discuss common problems like the difficulties of funding and distribution. Those in attendance decided that some sort of central organization could help, so they soon formed the Cooperative of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers. They changed "Cooperative" to "Committee" for legal reasons shortly thereafter.[929] It was led by a seven member board-of-directors, all of whom operated an independent press. They were all men, a reflection of the patriarchal bias of the underground as a whole. This would change over the next several years, when women like Carole Bergè, Diane Kruchkow, Mary Macarthur, Judy Hogan, and Anne Pride were elected to board positions.[930] The founding board included publishers from all over the United States, including several well-known advocates of underground ideology: Fulton, who ran Dustbooks in Paradise, California; Harry Smith, who ran The Smith Press in

[928] COSMEP advisor Felix Pollak explicitly connected the organization to an underground literary tradition stretching through the Mimeograph Revolution and all the way back to *Neurotica* in the preface to the organization's 1969 catalogue. See Felix Pollak, "Preface," in *Catalogue of Small Press Publications* (San Francisco: COSMEP, 1969), 2.

[929] Richard Morris, "COSMEP," in *The Publish-It-Yourself Handbook*, ed. Bill Henderson (Yonkers: The Pushcart Press, 1973), 273.

[930] Hugh Fox, "John Bennetting It – A Preliminary Inquiry into Why John Bennett Walked out at the End of the COSMEP Conference in Davis in the Summer of 1975 After Having Been Elected Chair One and Having Chaired the Org Rather Competently for Four Days.," *COSMEP Newsletter* 7, no. 3 (December 1975): 3.

New York City; Richard Morris, who ran Camels Coming Press in Buffalo, New York; Jerry Burns, who ran Goliards Press out of Bellingham, Washington; Douglas Blazek, who ran Open Skull Press in Sacramento, California; Kirby Congdon of Interim Books in New York City; and Gerard Dombrowski, who ran Abyss Publications in Somerville, Massachusetts.[931] The organization also had two "advisors," who consulted with the board on various matters: James Boyer, who operated a press called Trace; and Felix Pollak, who was not a publisher, but a poet and a curator of rare books and little magazines at the University of Wisconsin.[932]

COSMEP formalized the informal network of relationships between poets, writers and publishers all across the nation. As the organization declared in their first newsletter, membership was "open to any press, magazine, or newspaper of limited circulation" and initially cost five dollars yearly.[933] Its early members included longstanding members of the underground, including Carole Bergé, Lawrence Ferlinghetti of City Lights Books, and Ted and Joan Wilentz of Corinth Books, which had published works by Allen Ginsberg, Diane di Prima, and LeRoi Jones.[934] It also attracted several underground newspapers, including Thomas Forcade's Arizona-based *Orpheus* and the New Orleans-based *NOLA Express*.[935] Radical political journals like *Radical America* joined, as did a

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931 "COSMEP Members January 1, 1970," *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 6 (January 1970): 1–4.
932 Ibid., 4.
933 *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1969): 1; "1970 Memberships," *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 4 (November 1969): 1.
934 *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1969), 1; "COSMEP Members January 1, 1970," 1. On Corinth Books, see Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, eds., "Corinth Books," in *A Secret Location On The Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (New York: Granary Books, 1998), 92–93.
935 "COSMEP Members August 1, 1969," *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1969): 3.

few publications unaffiliated with the underground, like *Partisan Review*.[936] It expanded quite rapidly. Morris claimed that at end of 1968, COSMEP had 150 members.[937] That number nearly doubled within a year.[938] By November of 1974, membership had increased to 709, with membership expected to increase to 1,000 the following year.[939]

Though most of its members would abandon it by the mid-1970s, subterranean ideology animated COSMEP's founding. As the writings of several key members attest, they understood the underground as a cultural bulwark against the alienating and destructive impulses of mainstream publishers. In that sense, COSMEP served as an institutional vehicle for developing the project inaugurated by the Mimeograph Revolution. The inclusion of Congdon and Blazek on the founding board-of-directors concretely situated them within this tradition. Pollak espoused longstanding subterranean beliefs in the organization's first publication. He argued that art in the "slick mass media" had "become a consumer good, a fortified & enriched & homogenized & pasteurized & filtertipped kingsize commodity for the maninthestreet & his legalwife."[940] It was a space where "even sex is served up in a piping hot solution of antiseptic neonlight, guaranteed to kill the germs of prurience on contact."[941] He saw the literary underground of "littlemags and small press products" as "the last reservoirs – not to say, reservations – of individualism in an increasingly anonymous, faceless & defaced, prefabricated,

[936] Ibid.
[937] Richard Morris, "Coordinator's Report," *COSMEP Newsletter* 6, no. 2 (2): November 1974.
[938] "COSMEP Members January 1, 1970."
[939] Morris, "Coordinator's Report."
[940] Pollak, "Preface," 2.
[941] Ibid.

dehumanized mass society & supermarket civilization."[942] Poet, professor, publisher, and later COSMEP board member Hugh Fox wrote similarly. A recent entrant to what he called the "Hippy, Beat, Underground, Subterranean" world of the "little magazine scene" he advocated its commitment to cultural autonomy.[943] Echoing the critiques of figures like Congdon, he argued that "editors should be able to publish what they want because they want to, not because it will sell, please or displease the advertisers or subscribers."[944] The underground was where this could happen. He writes, "the TRUTH of the U.S. literary scene" is "that as far as the OVERGROUND is concerned there isn't one, and in terms of the UNDERGROUND that's where it is, baby, tha's where the juice is flowing, the drum beating, the glands secreting."[945] Fox's invocation of Sanders-esque bodily fluid metaphors suggests connections between his vision of the underground and the rhetoric and ideology of the obscene community. For COSMEP, the underground was a source of authentic cultural activity, one facilitated by its position outside alienating cultural institutions.

COSMEP dedicated itself to providing material support to the underground community it represented. As anarchist poet and COSMEP member Dan Georgakas put it in 1972, COSMEP's original purpose was to "strengthen the genuine underground/alternative culture" that had emerged over the course of the 1960s.[946] It had

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[942] Ibid., 1–2.
[943] Hugh Fox, "A Personal Introduction," in *Anthology 2, of Poems Read at the Midwest COSMEP Conference, Held at Ann Arbor, June 1969*, ed. Hugh Fox (East Lansing, MI: Hugh Fox, 1969), 1, 2.
[944] Ibid., 2.
[945] Emphasis in Source, ibid.
[946] Dan Georgakas to COSMEP, *COSMEP Newsletter* 3, no. 5 (February 1972): 5. Georgakas was a founding member of the New York City- based Dadaist influenced anarchist art collective Black Mask, as

grand ambitions. Fox claimed that the organization hoped to one day serve as a "central distribution point" for small press publications, and imagined it establishing "a graphics-printing headquarters where young editors can go to learn about typesetting, offset presses, letterpresses, plateburning, and layout."[947] These plans did not materialize in the form Fox predicted, but COSMEP did provide a range of services and materials for its members. They sponsored yearly national conferences that featured workshops about all aspects of independent publishing, as well poetry readings.[948] In 1969, they began publishing the *COSMEP Newsletter* on a monthly basis. Primarily edited by Morris, a typical issue featured a list of members, news about upcoming member publications, and editorials by members on the state of the organization. It also came to feature articles about the publishing process, covering subjects like how to finance specific publishing projects and the benefits of different publishing technologies.[949] They also responded to crises as they occurred. When editor of member publication *NOLA Express* Robert Head and Darlene Fife faced federal charges of "mailing obscene matter," they pledged to

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well as a member of anarchist group Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers. On Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers, see Gavin Grindon, "Poetry Written in Gasoline: Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker," *Art History* 38, no. 1 (February 2015): 170–209. He also served on the editorial board of *Cineaste*, a radical film studies journal.

947 Fox, "A Personal Introduction," 2.

948 The proceedings of the 1968 and 1969 were anthologized. See Richard Krech and John Oliver Simon, eds., *The Anthology of Poems Read at COSMEP, the Conference of Small-Magazine Editors & Pressmen, in Berkeley, California, May 23-26 1968* (Berkeley: Undermine Press/ Aldebarran Review, 1968); Hugh Fox, ed., *Anthology 2, of Poems Read at the Midwest COSMEP Conference, Held at Ann Arbor, June 1969* (East Lansing, MI: Hugh Fox, 1969).

949 See, for instance, Ted Wilentz, "Laundry Tickets and Small Presses," *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 11 (July 1970): 1–2; George Thompson, "Pasting Up: Little-Mag Birth Without Fear," *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 5 (February 1971): 3–6.

provide as much information as possible about the matter to members, likely a way to prepare them should they face similar charges.[950]

Some of its practices, however, reveal a gap between the underground ideals that animated COSMEP and the reality of supporting a dispersed and underfunded literary community. COSMEP itself was not a profit-seeking entity: its focus was on supporting its members' ability to publish work on their own terms. They hoped to increase distribution and sales of small press publications without sacrificing the cultural autonomy of its members. To that end, members agreed that relationships with companies and institutions they linked with the establishment were necessary and permissible assuming they did not impose any editorial restrictions on members' works.

This spirit of compromise, the very same that would later become a source of controversy, was evident in the organization's major projects of 1969. That year, they published and freely distributed the *Catalogue of Small Press Publications*, a comprehensive catalogue of member publications that they sent to anybody they felt might be interested in selling small press publications.[951] They sent it to independent booksellers, cultural organizations they identified as allies, and libraries.[952] They especially focused on the last of these: 6,500 copies of the *Catalogue of Small Press Publications* went out to American libraries, mostly those affiliated with colleges and universities.[953] They argued that they were "the best customers that littlemags and small

[950] *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 9 (May 1970): 2.
[951] COSMEP, ed., *Catalogue of Small Press Publications* (San Francisco: COSMEP, 1969).
[952] *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (1969): 1; Morris, "COSMEP," 273–74.
[953] "1971 COSMEP Conference," *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 11 (August 1971): 2; "Libraries," *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 10 (July 1971): 8–10.

presses have."[954] In reaching out to academic libraries, they created a relationship between themselves and the institutions early architects of the mimeograph revolution sought to escape. Other COSMEP activities reflected a willingness to forge ties with other allegedly aboveground organizations. While COSMEP certainly focused their efforts on raising awareness of small press publications in underground outlets, mainly the underground press, they also reached out to well-known publications like the *New York Times Book Review* and the *New York Review of Books*.[955] When they began publishing the *COSMEP Newsletter*, they announced that it was being sent to both "underground and establishment media."[956] They continued to seek out such opportunities assuming they would not shape the content of member publications. For instance, when a speaker at their 1969 conference suggested that little magazine editors should reconsider their "fetish of pushing the experimental and the new" in favor of publishing "the standard, the traditional, [and] the square" literature most librarians were looking for, he was roundly dismissed.[957]

COSMEP itself would not have existed in the absence of such compromises. If underground publishers could barely support themselves, they certainly struggled to support a national organization. COSMEP's continued existence was always an uphill battle. It had one paid employee in Morris, who received a monthly stipend of three hundred dollars to edit the newsletter and respond to member inquiries, but volunteer

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954 *COSMEP Newsletter*, Special Issue: Libraries and Reviewers (1971): 1.
955 Morris, "COSMEP," 277.
956 *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (1969): 1.
957 Don Dorrance, "The Literary Magazine: The Search for an Audience," in *Anthology 2, of Poems Read at the Midwest COSMEP Conference, Held at Ann Arbor, June 1969* (East Lansing, MI: Hugh Fox, 1969), 4–5.

labor sustained it.[958] The only reason it managed to survive its first year was because board member Smith managed to secure a grant from CCLM. At the organization's first conference in 1968, members agreed that they would accept government money through organizations like CCLM or the NEA assuming that "there were no strings attached and the money was distributed where it was needed."[959] There was some debate on this point, but the overwhelming majority of attendees agreed that the money was necessary. The original CCLM grant amounted to 7,000 dollars. That money comprised nearly eighty-one percent of COSMEP's operating budget between October 1968 and December 1969.[960] Their budgets for the next several years reflected a similar reliance upon CCLM grant money.[961] In other words, COSMEP would have collapsed even before it got off the ground in the absence of government support.

The relationships COSMEP was forming between the underground and the establishment were sources of anxiety for longtime members of the subterranean literary community. The reliance on government funds was a particular source of worry. It clearly violated the subterranean ideal of cultural autonomy. Furthermore, many argued that to receive government funds was to implicitly endorse its policies and values. These anxieties erupted in the summer of 1970, when Lawrence Ferlinghetti publicly challenged

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958 "Money," *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 5 (December 1969): 1.

959 "We Want the World," *Berkeley Barb*, June 31, 1968, 8.

960 COSMEP was always transparent with its financial information, and published their yearly budgets in the *COSMEP Newsletter*. In the December 1969 issue, they identified that year's income (which included grant money, savings account interest, newsletter subscriptions, catalogue advertising, as well as membership and catalogue listing fees) and its expenditures (which included employee salary, typesetting and printing costs, postage and mailing fees, legal fees, and office and supply equipment). That year, they brought in $8,992.03, $7000.00 of which came from the CCLM grant. Their expenditures amounted to $8,645.95. See "Money," December 1969, 1.

961 "Financial Statement for 1972," *COSMEP Newsletter* 4, no. 6 (March 1973): 1; "Money," *COSMEP Newsletter* 5, no. 5 (February 1974): 2.

the organization over such issues, leading to a lengthy debate about the ethics of taking government money. What was at stake in this debate, however, was the character of the underground, and whether or not it remained a viable concept for artists and activists interested in a profoundly oppositional form of cultural politics.

Most of COSMEP's activities over the summer and fall of 1970 focused on the funding controversy. It began when Ferlinghetti published a letter in June of 1970 in the *COSMEP Newsletter* critiquing the organization for receiving money originating from the state. He writes, "Thanks for listing City Lights as a COSMEP member in your latest newsletter, but the fact is we should not be listed. I don't know how this came about, since I as a poet and City Lights as a publisher have from the first consistently refused to participate in any organization or program funded directly or indirectly by U.S. government money."[962] His reasons were Marcusean: "it does seem to me that Herbert Marcuse's observation as to the enormous capacity of the repressive society (whether capitalist or Communist) to ingest its own most dissident elements has proved all too true in the case of poets and Little Presses in the past decade in the USA."[963] He requested that his letter be read at the upcoming COSMEP conference in Buffalo, New York, which was to be attended by a range of underground and establishment publishing figures, including Robert Creeley, Leslie Fielder, George Plimpton, Allen Ginsberg, and Caroline

[962] Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "A Letter from Lawrence Ferlinghetti," *COSMEP Newsletter*, Special Issue: COSMEP Bookstore Survey (1970): 3.

[963] Emphasis in source, ibid. Ferlinghetti is referring to one of Herbert Marcuse's central arguments in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Marcuse pessimistically argued that American capitalism had demonstrated itself wholly capable of incorporating dissenting and revolutionary elements, nullifying their potential to enact political change. See Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

Rand Herron, the executive director of CCLM, as well as rank-and-file COSMEP members.[964] At the conference, Ferlinghetti's letter was the subject of fierce debate. As Joan Wilentz recounted in a report on the conference, attendees coalesced around two positions: some opposed federal policies, especially with regards to the war in Vietnam, but felt like they could accept government money without bowing to government wishes; others took a hardline position and refused government subsidies on principle.[965] CCLM representative Herron saw the debate as wrongheaded, as "over half of COSMEP's membership had received CCLM grants at one time or another."[966] Conference attendees decided to vote on the matter after Ferlinghetti called for a resolution that would bar COSMEP from receiving, directly or indirectly, any support from the federal government. It was defeated by a vote of eighty-three to thirty-five.[967]

The conference debate effectively split COSMEP into two camps that reflected the results of the vote, and contributed to a minor exodus from the organization. Ferlinghetti promptly resigned in astonishment and dismay: "I was a bit shocked to see the size of the final vote against my resolution. What it amounts to, no matter how you may rationalize it, is *acquiescence* in the general policies of the government."[968] He argued that taking their money effectively meant they consented to American military incursions in Vietnam, and they supported its censorial cultural politics. Most took a position that reflected longstanding ideological compromises COSMEP was willing to

964 *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 10 (June 1970): 1.
965 Joan Wilentz, "Life Among the Littles," *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 12 (August 1970): 2.
966 Ibid.
967 *COSMEP Newsletter* 1, no. 12 (August 1970): 4.
968 Lawrence Ferlinghetti to Richard Morris, *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 2 (November 1970): 2.

make. Morris argued that "COSMEP must accept grants if it is to continue to exist."[969] Congdon surprisingly supported Morris's position, claiming that Ferlinghetti's resolution was "immature, extremely narrow, and quite unconstructive."[970] Julie Newman, editor of *The Tenth Muse*, declared, "TAKE THE MONEY AND KEEP IT FROM WORSE USES."[971]

The debate intensified when it became clear that Ferlinghetti's fears were not unfounded. In the months after the conference, members learned that George Plimpton, then serving as editor of the NEA-funded *American Literary Anthology*, opted not to publish Ed Sanders's sexually explicit short story "The Hairy Table," so as to not offend government figures.[972] Plimpton had attended the COSMEP conference in Buffalo where he discussed the *American Literary Anthology* project, and was aware of the debates then raging within the organization.[973] Sanders's story originally appeared in Jan Herman's little magazine *The San Francisco Earthquake* and had been selected to appear in the prestigious volume. However, Plimpton, at the urging of NEA head and Richard Nixon appointee Nancy Hanks, opted to remove the story shortly before it went to press. Hanks and Plimpton feared that Congress would revoke NEA's funding should such material be

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[969] Emphasis in source, Richard Morris, "Editor's Note," *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 2 (November 1970): 2.
[970] Kirby Congdon, *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 2 (November 1970): 3.
[971] Julie Newman, *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 2 (November 1970): 2.
[972] In his memoirs, Sanders claims that the story was so explicit, it caused NEA head Nancy Hanks to faint upon reading it. He reports that the *Kansas City Star* claimed "the short story deliberately carries obscenity to an absurd extreme." See Sanders, *Fug You*, 392–93.
[973] Wilentz, "Life Among the Littles," 1.

published. [974] As soon as word got out about the decision to remove the story, it sparked an outcry amongst longtime members of the underground who likely saw the act of censorship as portent of events to come should COSMEP continue to receive government funds through organizations like the NEA and the CCLM. In a letter printed in the *COSMEP Newsletter,* poet Robert Bly decried Plimpton's decision to accept government support in the first place, called for his resignation, and claimed he "humiliated" himself and "all American writers connected with" him.[975] Plimpton responded defensively, effectively claiming he had no choice: "I wonder what you would have done had you been in my shoes. In the balance allegedly was the continuation of the Anthology program, and indeed the Endowment program itself – being brought up before a Congress with some very hostile elements in it. The beneficiaries, would be, if the program continued, a great many writers and poets – and I felt it important to think about them."[976] Many sided with Plimpton. Congdon, for instance, argued that these sorts of compromises were necessary, especially if they bettered the already miserable situation of writers as a whole.[977]

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[974] Michael Straight, *Nancy Hanks, An Intimate Portrait: The Creation of a National Commitment to the Arts* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1988), 162–65.

[975] Robert Bly to George Plimpton, *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 4 (1970): 4.

[976] George Plimpton to Robert Bly, *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 5 (February 1971): 2.

[977] In a letter to COSMEP, Congdon essentially endorsed Plimpton's position, writing "there arise, and quite frequently it seems, in an individual's life – and perhaps in an organization's 'life' – when he has to say to himself 'Yes, to achieve this, I will have to forgo that.' Sometimes one is forced to decide whether one wants to be a writer or an accountant. But when the accountants themselves want you to be a writer, and will help you be a writer – if only you would write more happy poems – then you start thinking, 'Well, Jesus Christ, I must have a couple of happy poems in the box under the bed. And, maybe, if I cooperated just a little, I could invent a whole book of them. Then, when that's published, I'll show them my real stuff." See Kirby Congdon to The Editors, *COSMEP Newsletter* 2, no. 6 (March 1971): 3.

The debate over the ethics of government funding and underground literary production was effectively a displaced debate over the viability of the underground as a concept. The relationships between COSMEP and so-called establish institutions reflected a new dynamic between the underground and the world it ostensibly opposed, one that longtime subterraneans like Ferlinghetti could not abide. Rather than see the surface world as something to be avoided, many in COSMEP believed they could take advantage of its resources whilst avoiding its influence. This amounted to a reconfiguration of the underground in the imagination of poets and publishers. Its reliance upon the establishment shattered any illusion of radical exteriority: it became underground in name only. It could no longer be described as an independent or autonomous entity outside the aboveground world. As Georgakas put it in a letter to the COSMEP board, "As many of the oldtimers have been noting, too many of us are now surviving by route of grants and libraries and collectors. Isn't this the antithesis of why the underground got going in the first place?"[978] COSMEP's underground, it would seem, shared the same topography as the state and the cultural institutions aligned with it, functioning not as an oppositional world that prefigured a radical alternative, but as one choice, a niche, among many others.

This reconfiguration of the underground was a function of COSMEP's desire to expand its own literary community and the inability of that community to support itself without turning to state programs. COSMEP had no designs on exploiting the underground, and were not "selling it out." By all accounts, they remained committed to

[978] Dan Georgakas to COSMEP, *COSMEP Newsletter* 3, no. 5 (February 1972): 5.

supporting underground literature and expressed the desire to adhere to subterranean ideals. This was made clear by the fact that COSMEP pledged to not accept CCLM funding for the following year's meeting in La Jolla, California. They would instead hold their conference in conjunction with the California Creative Arts Conference (CCAC) at the University of California at San Diego. CCAC pledged to provide funds to COSMEP.[979] However, in a course of events that testifies to the dire financial situation small presses faced in the 1970s, the CCAC could not provide the funds due to lack of interest in their conference. COSMEP was forced to turn to the CCLM, which "came through with a last minute grant to pay for lodging of conference participants and other incidental expenses."[980] At the 1972 COSMEP conference, Harry Smith, reflecting upon the past several years, expressed caution about the organization's reliance upon government money, stating that while it was "reasonable to participate in public programs which are good and fairly conducted" it was important that COSMEP "never build structures of dependency upon public money."[981] At that point, however, they already were dependent upon it. Smith's assertion suggests it was something they did not want to reckon with, as they remained committed to traditionally-defined underground values despite actions that spoke to the contrary.

In 1972, COSMEP thought they could have it both ways: they believed they could receive government aid without reconfiguring their relationship to the establishment, a position that was easy to maintain given that COSMEP's leadership was so hesitant to

[979] *COSMEP Newsletter*, Special Issue: 1971 Conference in La Jolla (1971): 1.
[980] "1971 COSMEP Conference," 1.
[981] Harry Smith, "Report from the Chairman: COSMEP Conference 1972," *COSMEP Newsletter* 3, no. 10/11 (August 1972): 3.

admit to themselves and their membership that they depended upon federal money. It was a different story the following year, when another controversy regarding CCLM funding emerged. In 1973, CCLM abruptly denied two grant proposals submitted by COSMEP, an act that provoked immediate response in COSMEP member publications.[982] Members argued that the grant denial stemmed from bias within the organization for publications affiliated with established media and literary outlets, a result of nepotism and purposeful neglect. Paul Foreman, COSMEP board member and editor of the Berkeley-based Thorps Spring Press, claimed that CCLM was profoundly undemocratic, and that it was organized to "grab off the available National Endowment money for the academic quarterlies like *Partisan Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, [and] *Triquarterly*."[983] As he pointed out, CCLM board member William Phillips was also the editor of *Partisan Review*. Morris agreed, noting that *Partisan Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Triquarterly* all received far more funds than others.[984] Relations between the two organizations worsened when it became clear that CCLM had failed to inform independent publishers of changes in its policies, insuring grant applications from groups like COSMEP would be immediately denied.[985] CCLM initially denied any impropriety, but after several months of prodding by COSMEP and its members, representatives from

[982] "CCLM Cuts off Grant Support to COSMEP," *COSMEP Newsletter* 5, no. 3 (December 1973): 1.
[983] Paul Foreman, "Robbers Still Rule the Roost, A Report on the CCLM Fall 1973 Conference in Phoenix, Arizona," *COSMEP Newsletter* 5, no. 5 (February 1974): 3.
[984] Richard Morris, "Editor's Comment," *COSMEP Newsletter* 5, no. 5 (February 1974): 4.
[985] Foreman, "Robbers Still Rule the Roost, A Report on the CCLM Fall 1973 Conference in Phoenix, Arizona," 3; Morris, "Editor's Comment," 4.

CCLM and the NEA admitted that they had made some mistakes and would revise their policies.[986]

If the cultural autonomy of the underground was at stake in the initial debate over COSMEP's relationship to CCLM and the state, then this second controversy demonstrates the extent to which the organization abandoned any pretense of adhering to traditional underground ideals. Unlike the previous CCLM controversy, the arguments put forth by COSMEP members here did not focus on whether or not they should receive government money. Rather, most assumed that they would and that they should. As Len Fulton declared in a letter sent to Glenna Luschei, a member of the National Endowment's Literature Panel, "We feel quite naturally that COSMEP should receive its fair share of NEA funds to small magazines and presses."[987] Morris argued similarly, writing, "I was dissatisfied with the grants given, not because I thought that the university-affiliated magazines got too much, but because I thought some of the independent magazines got too little."[988] These sorts of statements, largely supported by COSMEP as a whole, do not reflect any hesitation about whether or not the organization or its members should be receiving government funds.[989] Any anxiety the organization might have felt about such a relationship appeared to have dissipated. This was a function

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[986] Howard McCord to Paul Foremen, *COSMEP Newsletter* 5, no. 6 (March 1974): 4; Diane Kruchkow, "Report on Northeast Conference," *COSMEP Newsletter* 5, no. 6 (April 1974): 2–3; George Hitchcock to Richard Morris, *COSMEP Newsletter* 5, no. 6 (April 1974): 5.

[987] Len Fulton to Glenna Luschei, *COSMEP Newsletter* 5, no. 5 (February 1974): 5.

[988] Morris, "Editor's Comment."

[989] In 1974, COSMEP conducted a survey of its members about various issues, including their opinions on CCLM's administration of its grants program. A special issue of the *COSMEP Newsletter* dedicated to relaying the survey results claimed that 63.7% of respondents were not satisfied with their actions or practices. The rest of the questionnaire demonstrates broad sympathies to COSMEP's position that they should have received more funds. See *COSMEP Newsletter*, Special Issue: Questionnaire Results (May 1974): 1.

the organization's recognition that it could no longer claim independence as subterraneans classically defined it. COSMEP or the literary world it represented could not imagine itself outside the domain of the established literary world. Their underground, in other words, had surfaced and adopted the rules, values, and logics of the surface world. Later actions attested to this. For instance, in the early 1970s they began seeking tax-except status, first as a non-profit and later as a "business league," an official category with the Internal Revenue Service that, if anything, truly marked them as having settled in with the establishment.[990]

Many in the COSMEP decried these developments, but such perspectives appeared to be the minority. In 1975, Fox commented that the organization's "cellular nature" was changing and pondered its future, writing, "How is COSMEP going to be in ten years, completely changed from its initial purposes, is it going to be all org-talk, committees and by-laws and *ex-oficios* and procedural discussions? Or can it mix, meld, fuse business-awareness and art?"[991] Alan Rosenus, a member since the early 1970s, wrote, "Each year COSMEP becomes less anti-establishment and more commercially minded, and when it comes time to pay dues I wonder why I continue to say in the organization."[992] Such claims bespeak a loss of faith in the oppositional power of COSMEP and the community such figures believed it to represent, but many in the organization saw its changes in more positive terms. Board member Anne Pride

[990] Anne Pride, "Board Report," *COSMEP Newsletter* 6, no. 3 (December 1974): 2; "COSMEP Obtains Tax-Exempt Status," *COSMEP Newsletter* 9, no. 6 (March 1978): 6.
[991] Fox, "John Bennetting It – A Preliminary Inquiry into Why John Bennett Walked out at the End of the COSMEP Conference in Davis in the Summer of 1975 After Having Been Elected Chair One and Having Chaired the Org Rather Competently for Four Days.," 6.
[992] Alan Rosenus to COSMEP, *COSMEP Newsletter* 9, no. 3 (December 1977): 6.

responded to Fox's charges with praise for COSMEP's new operating procedures and stability: "We cannot be labeled conformist, hardly business-y, but we are different in a way Hugh Fox fails to understand. We seek to learn to learn from the past. Rather than abandoning structure, some of us look for ways to make it work for the ideals we believe in."[993] She saw recent developments within the organization as opportunities to more clearly realize COSMEP's goals, an implicit refutation of its earlier ideals.

COSMEP's history from its founding to the mid-1970s demonstrates how the literary underground transformed. It did not disappear: the community of small publishers that flourished in the 1960s did not stop working. COSMEP, for one, existed as national organization until 1996, effectively functioning as the dominant professional organization for small publishers in the United States.[994] However, the literary community that first gave birth to COSMEP came to understand itself in very different terms. Subterranean separatism had proven unsustainable. The ideals that animated it seemed less and less relevant. These publishers abandoned their anti-establish hostility in favor of détente. They did not join the establishment by any means, but came to see themselves as a parallel institution, a niche within a larger cultural world.

THE UNDERGROUND PRESS IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS

By the late 1960s, underground newspapers were the most dominant and visible underground cultural form. Underground film, literature, and drama expanded over the

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[993] Anne Pride, "After the Fox -- Some Thoughts on the Organization in the Past and What That Means to the Present with a Cautious Eye to the Future. A Response to Hugh Fox," *COSMEP Newsletter* 7, no. 4 (January 1976): 4.

[994] Tom Person, "Life After COSMEP," *Laughing Bear Newsletter*, 1996, http://www.laughingbear.com/lbn.asp?mode=article&subMode=sp_cosmep.

course of the decade, but underground newspapers proliferated at an astounding rate all across the United States.[995] First emerging as independent outlets for news tied to specific cities and regional communities, they soon became a national phenomenon and national organizations like the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) and Liberation News Service (LNS) appeared. These organizations formalized ties between otherwise dispersed underground communities, but operated like establishment cultural institutions, a source of anxiety for some within the underground and a welcome development for others.[996] In that sense, the history of underground papers followed that of the literary underground. As seen in the history of COSMEP, such organizations increasingly reached out to institutions and ideas they linked with the establishment so as to financially sustain themselves and the community they originated from, rendering any claims to radical exteriority hollow. This ultimately lead to the abandonment of the term underground and the ideas it signified, an act best represented in UPS's decision to change its name to the Alternative Press Syndicate. Underground in this context soon took on very different connotations, a consequence of the increasingly politically militant tenor of the underground newspaper community. This section traces this history, beginning with a brief discussion of how subterranean editors and journalists understood themselves as

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[995] This is perhaps why underground newspapers have been studied by scholars from a variety of disciplines ever since they first emerged. On its history, see Robert J. Glessing, *The Underground Press in America* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1970); Laurence Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries: The Rise of the Underground Press* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972); Roger Lewis, *Outlaws of America: The Underground Press and Its Context* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972); David Armstrong, *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1981); Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*.

[996] On the growth of the national underground newspaper community see McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 31–82.

underground. It follows with an analysis of the ways LNS and UPS helped this community consolidate and expand, a process that prompted many subterraneans to question and ultimately abandon the ideals that enabled that community's emergence.

Underground newspapers emerged out of the various subterranean artistic communities that formed in the early-to-mid 1960s. Underground journalist and publisher Thomas King Forcade once described the underground press of the late 1960s as "the loving product of the best minds of my generation, running screaming through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry printing press."[997] His invocation of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* situates the underground newspaper movement within the longer history of the underground, identifying it as the latest incarnation of the hip underground.[998] The first underground newspapers were closely affiliated with urban communities with significant underground presences: in Los Angeles, there was the *Los Angeles Free Press* (founded in 1964); in New York City, there was the *East Village Other* (founded in 1965); Berkeley had the *Berkeley Barb* (founded in 1965); and Austin had *The Rag* (founded in 1965). Of course, they were not limited to such communities: papers emerged all across the nation, practically everywhere other underground cultural practices were happening.[999]

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[997] Thomas King Forcade, in *Countdown 1: A Subterranean Magazine* (New York: New American Library, 1970), 180.

[998] As historian John McMillian argues, the earliest underground newspapers emerged out of highly localized communities of "self-stylized cultural outlaws" in the mid-1960s that included "freelance intellectuals, dissenters artists, folk and jazz musicians, who clustered in taverns and espresso houses in low-rent neighborhoods." See McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 6.

[999] McMillian notes that "it is impossible to measure precisely the scope of the underground press at any one time in the late 1960s. Some papers were well established and had paid circulations in the tens of thousands, while others were short lived and irregularly published." Estimates range from 150 to 500 newspapers. Circulation estimates range from 1.5 million to 2 million. See Ibid., 192.

Though many subterranean editors and journalists would question the underground's ethical commitments to autonomy in the early 1970s, in the mid-to-late 1960s they embraced them. Their beliefs were rooted in a critique of establishment and aboveground media as dishonest and completely incapable of addressing the needs and concerns of the public. Lincoln Bergman, a contributing editor at *The Movement*, writes, "Why an underground newspaper? Because the truths they tell cannot be told in the mass media, because they serve needs that are not being served, because a generation in rebellion and facing repression needs a voice."[1000] Such statements were recurrent refrains within the underground press. For instance, in 1967, editor Joe Korpsak suggested that the underground's emergence signaled the failure of the mainstream newsmedia to cover subjects of importance to local communities: "When the established news media does not fulfill its responsibility to report, document, and debate substantial areas of concern and importance, the underground press responds to community needs and bridges the information gap by fully informing the community of what is happening."[1001] John Wilcock, one of the founders of the proto-underground newspaper the *Village Voice* and editor of the *East Village Other*, made similar claims a year later, stating "There is a credibility gap between the press and the people, because the newspaper owners are plain and simple liars."[1002]

[1000] Lincoln Bergman, "Last Word from Underground," in *The Underground Pres in America* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1970), 161–62.
[1001] Joe Korpsak, "What the Underground Represents," in *Underground Press Guide* (Los Angeles: Other Press, 1967), 2.
[1002] John Wilcock, "Foolosophy of the Flower Children," *Other Scenes*, December 28, 1968, 24.

For underground journalists, subterranea was the only place where authentic and relevant news could be expressed. It was a liberated space devoid of the search for profit and the relations of production that made that search possible. For example, as Bergman put it, "Why go underground? Because there ain't no room for movement overground."[1003] For such figures, it possessed values directly at odds with that of the "overground" world. A letter from an aspiring underground journalist named Leo Burt to Wilcock aptly captures this view:

> Since what I'm after is not prestige and money, I see no reason why the underground press shouldn't offer me a better opportunity for my kind of success. And that is: a happy, non-rat-race life; a chance to meet interesting people, do interesting work; a chance to develop my journalistic, creative and intellectual talents (if any) to the fullest, without compromising my morals or individuality; and a chance to do something constructive for society in general.[1004]

For Burt, the underground press was part of a separate world that was the antithesis of the "rat-race," a characterization that recalls longstanding subterranean critiques of dominant commercial enterprises that they claimed valued profit over individual expression.[1005] This critique animated their production practices. Subterranean journalists and editors shunned any sense of organization that even resembled those methods and practices of

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[1003] Bergman, "Last Word from Underground," 161.

[1004] Leo Burt to Underground Press Syndicate, 9 March 1969, John Wilcock Papers, Folder: Correspondence A-D, Box 1, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library (hereafter cited as John Wilcock Papers). Burt became a well-known student radical and fugitive after joining the militant "New Year's Gang" and aiding in the bombing of the Army Mathematics Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on August 24, 1970, an act that resulted in one death and 2.1 million dollars in property damage. As of 2015, he remains at large. See Tom Bates, *Rads: The 1970 Bombing of the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin and Its Aftermath* (New York: Harpercollins, 1992); "Wanted by the FBI: Leo Frederick Burt," *Federal Bureau of Investigations*, August 19, 2010, https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/dt/ leo-frederick-burt.

[1005] Subterranean newspapers' rejection of objectivity could be traced to this impulse. Underground papers were committed to a subjective reporting style, a function of the fact that most underground journalists were active within the scenes and movements they documented. On this, see Glessing, *The Underground Press in America*, 1970, 99–100; McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 94–95.

the aboveground world. As journalism scholar Robert Glessing noted in 1970, "most underground publishers [are] both ignorant and unconcerned with normal methods of accounting, advertising, distribution, and organization."[1006] Instead, subterranean journalists and editors adopted an artisanal mode of production characteristic of other underground cultural scenes designed to minimize ties to commercial enterprises. One guide to producing underground newspapers declared that "anybody can start a newspaper. In these days of the photo offset revolution all you need is a typewriter – an IBM one is best with interchangeable typefaces – and a lot of artwork."[1007] Most were supported by volunteer labor. The few that were not, including the *Los Angeles Free Press* and the *Philadelphia Drummer*, were not considered "very underground" by their subterranean peers.[1008] Though most papers had to cooperate with private companies in order to survive – few newspaper owners could physically print a thousand copies of an issue at their office or home – but such relationships were always suspect, a necessary evil that could hopefully be overcome at some point. The more one embraced them, the less underground one was.

This hostile relationship to what subterraneans identified as the establishment mattered far more than content for early underground newspapers. Forcade for instance, linked underground-ness with this hostility when he declared "the more underground a publication the more radically it is opposed to the society in which it operates."[1009] This

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[1006] Glessing, *The Underground Press in America*, 1970, 7.
[1007] "How To Start Your Own Underground Newspaper," *Underground Publishing* 1, no. 2 (August 1968): 3–4.
[1008] Quoted in Glessing, *The Underground Press in America*, 1970, 93.
[1009] Quoted in ibid., 14.

perspective accounts for the diverse range of content that appeared in underground newspapers during the mid-to-late 1960s. As many scholars have noted, underground papers frequently oscillated between focusing on specifically cultural and political matters, though the latter would eventually come to dominate.[1010] So-called "cultural papers" focused on the range of artistic practices within the underground.[1011] They frequently covered events in the underground community, featured the writings of well-known subterraneans, and reviewed underground works.[1012] "Political papers" explored various aspects of "the movement," whether that was the student movement, various wings of the New Left, or emergent racial and ethnic nationalism such as the Black and Brown Power movements. Most papers featured a combination of cultural and political material. Papers that focused on one more than other were sometimes at odds with one another at this point in time, but any conflicts within them did not negate their hostility to

[1010] As McMillian describes the trajectory of what began as community-oriented underground newspapers, "after playing a vital role by strengthening the activist movements in their backyards, many underground newspapers became mouthpieces for militant New Leftists and third-world revolutionaries, and in turn lost much of their distinctive local flavor." See McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 32.

[1011] For example, Forcade listed the following as appropriate subjects for an underground newspaper: "Radical theater, sexual freedom, the taboo against knowing who you are, communes, anarchy, draft resistance, light shows, peace and freedom, hashish and a thousand other things and non-things, real and imagined, ridiculous and sublime." See Tom Forcade, "The Underground Press Loves You," *Orpheus*, August 1968, 18.

[1012] For instance, the *Berkeley Barb* featured a frequent column called "The Scenedrome" which listed local events of interest, including film screenings, dramatic performances, poetry readings, political meetings, and concerts. A similar column appeared in Cleveland's *Burning River News* called "What's On." For demonstrative examples, see "The Scenedrome," *Berkeley Barb*, October 20-26, 1967, 16; "What's On," *Burning River News*, April 15-28, 1970, 15. Figures associated with the literary underground were frequent contributors. For instance, Douglas Blazek, Ed Sanders, Tuli Kupferberg, and Michael McClure contributed to underground newspapers at various times. See Douglas Blazek, "The Little Phenomena," *East Village Other*, February 23-29, 1968, 12–13; Ed Sanders, *Ann Arbor Argus* 2, no. 4 (1970): 10; Tuli Kupferberg, "The Hip & the Square," *Berkeley Barb*, August 4-10, 1967, 8; Michael McClure, "Poisoned Wheat," in *The Underground Reader* (New York: New American Library, 1972), 16–25.

the establishment that located them within the same imaginative location beneath mainstream America. Both were considered equally underground.

Regardless of the focus of a paper, they maintained this sense of hostility through traditionally subterranean means: they valued criminality, especially obscenity. Forcade went so far as to once describe the world of underground newspapers as the "obscene scene."[1013] They consciously deployed them as weapons against the establishment as did earlier members of the obscene community, replete with their often unrepentant patriarchal assumptions. The *Ann Arbor Argus*, for instance, ran a feature called "Outlaws of America" which featured cut-out cards of figures affiliated with "the movement," including John Sinclair, Huey Newton, and Afeni Shakur.[1014] Papers tended to print expletives indiscriminately in a conscious desire to provoke.[1015] Content was often pornographic. The *East Village Other* had a regular feature called "Slum Goddess" that presented nude photographs of local women. Nowhere was this obscene embrace more evident than in the comics that appeared in many underground papers, later known as "comix," with the "x" allegedly referring to their explicit content.[1016] Like the papers they appeared in, these comics embraced the obscene as a way of defying mainstream society, often in sexist terms that would later become the focus of multiple feminist

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[1013] Thomas King Forcade, "Obscene Scene," in *Countdown 2: A Subterranean Magazine* (New York: New American Library, 1970), 186.
[1014] "Outlaws of America," *Ann Arbor Argus*, February 24-March 10, 1970, 24.
[1015] McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 126.
[1016] Today, these comics are also known as "underground comics." As comics historian Mark Estren argues, this term emerged out of their association with underground newspapers. See Estren, *A History of Underground Comics*, 18.

critiques of underground newspapers.[1017] As McMillian notes, in these comics readers encountered the "most crass and perverse depictions of that appeared in underground newspapers, including group sex, incest, nonconsensual domination, and even sexual mutilation."[1018]

Given that underground newspapers were firmly ensconced within the larger obscene community of the underground, it is not surprising that they faced the same problems of police repression and financial difficulty, both of which made survival next to impossible. Their penchant for obscenity brought harassment and prosecution by federal, state, and local authorities. For instance, in January 1970, a federal grand jury indicted the publishers of the New Orleans-based *NOLA Express* under federal obscenity statutes after they published a sexually explicit cartoon satirizing *Playboy* magazine.[1019] The charges were later dropped when a judge identified the objectionable work as parody, and thus protected. As the PEN American Center reported in 1981, there were hundreds of similar cases brought against underground papers.[1020] Papers faced harassment and even physical violence from other sources. Unknown perpetrators bombed the office of *Space City News* in Houston in the summer of 1969.[1021] Often times printers refused to print material they found objectionable, likely a consequence of their

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[1017] Ibid., 20. On the response to such comics, see McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 120–21.
[1018] McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 126.
[1019] The local United States Attorney General's office described the offending issue and cartoon as "a cheap and unorganized tabloid consisting of trashy editorials, letters from its readers, classified ads, cartoons, and on page 16, an obscence [sic] and filthy picture of an ugly naked man with his hand wrapped tightly around his erect penis masturbating to a climax in front of four pictures of *Playboy*." Quoted in Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries: The Rise of the Underground Press*, 150–51.
[1020] Anne Janowitz and Nancy J. Peters, eds., *The Campaign Against the Underground Press* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1981).
[1021] Gavan, "Space City News Bombed," *The Rag*, July 31, 1969, 4.

own fear of reprisals.[1022] Compounding the problems raised by state repression were the difficulties in funding independent cultural and political work. A 1968 survey published in Forcade's *Orpheus* found that the vast majority of papers never made a profit.[1023] Obtaining distribution was never easy. It was hard for publishers to find outlets willing to distribute their works. Most papers were sold directly from their publishers, either to newsstands, on the street, or via subscription.[1024] Advertising, a staple means of supporting journalistic endeavors, was equally difficult to come by. Businesses aligned with the underground or the movement were the most likely to advertise within them, providing them with some degree of support, but rarely enough.

This was the context in which UPS and LNS emerged. Much like COSMEP, they were a direct response to the emergence and rapid growth of a fragile and dispersed journalistic community. Their formation signaled the desire to form institutions that collectively represented the underground press scene (and the underground writ large) that could stand as bulwarks against the threats posed by the state while also providing material aid to that scene and all it stood for. However, in expanding, these institutions pushed against the very ideals that animated their founding and members of each actively questioned reigning definitions of subterranean-ness. In the case of LNS, members sought new paradigms of rejecting the aboveground world. In the case of UPS, members ultimately rejected the label underground and all it signified.

[1022] For instance, In October of 1968, the printers that *The Rag* relied upon refused to print a page due to its contents. Journalist Harvey Stone reported, "This is not to indict the printer, but merely to illustrate that pressures upon him result in pressures upon us and the lack of freedom to print what we want." See Harvey Stone, "The Wayward Press," *The Rag*, October 14, 1968, 13.
[1023] "Orpheus Survey Results," *Underground Publishing* 1, no. 2 (August 1968): 4.
[1024] Ibid.

Ray Mungo and Marshall Bloom formed LNS in 1967 specifically to unify underground communities all across the nation, the idea being that a unified underground could stave off attacks and affect broader change. Initially based in Washington D.C., they later moved to New York City. At its founding, LNS advocated underground prefigurative politics.[1025] This was a function of Mungo and Bloom's anarchist beliefs, which hewed closer to those of the Yippies rather than those of the prominent and increasingly Marxist Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).[1026] Early members saw the organization as heralding an alternative society to come. As they would later write, "We wanted our very essence to signify the New Age, a new way for journalists, artists, and photographers to share, grow, and create together."[1027] They sought to create "a full and independent communications system for the New American Society" which required them to support all aspects of the underground, including "those who experiment and innovate in newspapers, magazines, television, radio, movies, and newsreels, teleprinters

[1025] Its first meeting, for instance, resembled a chaotic underground happening, replete with a cast of well-known underground performers that include Kenneth Anger, Shirley Clarke, John Wilcock, and various editors and writers affiliated with underground newspapers. As LNS member Harvey Wasserman described it, "Marshall [Bloom] burned his draft card in his Sgt. Pepper Jacket, Kenneth Anger sputtering something from the top of a ladder down at Shirley Clarke, who was taking pictures. Oh, it was a fine time." See Harvey Wasserman, "The Joy of Liberation News Service," in *Voices from the Underground: Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, ed. Ken Waschberger, vol. 1 (Tempe, AZ: Mica's Press, 1993), 52.

[1026] Writing in 1970, Mungo described his relationship to Rubin and the Yippies: "I've always found [Rubin's] writing very exciting, since he always knew the minds of the most sophisticated movement professionals. But his actual power and constituency was and is very small, and when he personally announced that 500,000 Yippies would demonstrate in Chicago, only the federal government believed him. In fact, Yippie…was a conspiracy only in that it didn't exist except in the minds of Jerry, Abbie Hoffman, Paul Krassner, Stu Alpert, and a few others in New York City, and in the pages of LNS." See Ray Mungo, *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with the Liberation News Service* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 59. On their anarchist beliefs, see Ibid., 156.

[1027] Liberation News Service - Mass, "Dear Friends," *Liberation News Service*, no. 100 (August 16, 1968): 5.

and guerilla news theaters, etc."[1028] In their view, this was the precondition for forging the alternative society the underground prefigured. While their rhetoric and goals were lofty, their practices were much more mundane. LNS resembled news service organizations like the Associated Press or United Press International, delivering weekly packets to subscribers that contained news articles, editorials, comics, and photographs relevant to the interests of the underground and the movement.[1029] This, however, was a vital service. Many papers depended upon the organization. LNS membership included members of the underground press and the establishment. By 1970, there were far more of the latter than the former: they had 150 "underground subscribers" and 350 "establishment subscribers."[1030]

LNS was extremely successful in forging a national community of underground newspapers, but this process inaugurated an existential crisis of sorts amongst its founders rooted in the expanded size and scope of their organization. As historian Blake Slonecker writes, "LNS enabled local rags to cover national and international news to an unprecedented degree, curbing their isolation and giving shape to a vibrant Movement print culture."[1031] This was precisely what the organization's founders had hoped would happen, but the process of institution building stirred some unease. The various policies and practices they adopted ensured that the underground press was a force to be reckoned

[1028] Liberation News Service, "What Is Liberation News Service?" [1967-1968?], Folder: LNS Related Materials, Box 3, John Wilcock Papers.
[1029] LNS member Harvey Wasserman makes this comparison in his brief history of the organization. See Wasserman, "The Joy of Liberation News Service," 51.
[1030] Glessing, *The Underground Press in America*, 1970, 73.
[1031] Blake Slonecker, *A New Dawn for the New Left: Liberation News Service, Montague Farm, and the Long Sixties* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

with on a national scale, but in their eyes they increasingly resembled the institutions of the aboveground world they initially fled. If subterraneans considered large underground papers like the *Los Angeles Free Press* not "very underground" given their size and resources, the same charge could be levied against LNS, and by extension the entire underground community they represented. This was a source of anxiety. A statement issued by LNS in 1968 made this clear:

> In several senses, LNS has been too successful. It is starting to be run in daily newspapers. Within its first year…it has grown to be one of the largest 'movement' groups in staff size and budget. How do you grow large without losing the original shared bonds and principles? How do you grow 'important' without attracting the interest and designs of those who cared less when LNS was an idea some said would never work? How could you stay flexible, responsive and imaginative and not become institutionalized as you become an accepted institution.[1032]

They feared subterranean principles were being lost in the drive to expand it, recognizing the contradiction always present but usually ignored in underground ideology. This was a crisis of identity: had LNS surfaced or were they still underground? If they were still underground, did the concept still mean what it once did?

LNS fractured as they tried to respond to such questions. It ultimately split into two camps, each of which reflected a different response to this identity crisis. Some of these now-anxious subterraneans tried to double-down on their principles and retreat further underground, others reconceptualized the meaning and relevance of "underground" as a political concept. As noted above, the organization's growth was a source of great angst for LNS's founders and original members. Internal conflicts within

[1032] Liberation News Service - Montague, "Dear Friends," *Liberation News Service*, no. 100 (August 16, 1968): 5.

the organization exacerbated those anxieties. After the group moved to New York City in 1968, its founders came into conflict with new members who clung to different political beliefs, namely those of the increasingly militantly Marxist SDS. Mungo, Bloom, and other early members decided to flee the city in the name of maintaining autonomy from the establishment they had become entwined with. [1033] They stripped the New York City LNS office of its equipment and fled to a farm in Montague, Massachusetts, intending to establish a movement-minded commune, a move that was in many ways the logical outcome of subterranean separatism. In a letter explaining their action, Mungo declared,

> We cannot be radicals, revolutionaries, or whatever, so long as we depend on the government, the 'establishment,' the system, for our survival, and American cities have rapidly made such dependence commonplace in a nation once settled by strong and independent men. Moving to the farm accentuates our self-reliance, forces us in a thousand subtle ways to learn skills and develop households which can stand, can survive, without the services of any government agencies and bureaus. We will heat our houses, grow our food, perhaps even provide our own electricity.[1034]

Mungo's response to the developing ties between LNS, the establishment, and the world they hoped to bring into being was to re-assert the primacy of underground separatism. Even the patriarchal assumptions of the underground are reasserted via Mungo's invocation of "independent men" and the mythology of American expansion. LNS's flight to the country was a way to flee further underground, moving to a space they defined as the ultimate in radical exteriority.

[1033] Mungo would later describe the feud as a conflict between "Vulgar Marxists" (or as he put it in more colorful terms, "the forces of constipation") and a "virtuous caucus." On the split, see Mungo, *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with the Liberation News Service*, 139–190; McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 141-171; Slonecker, *A New Dawn for the New Left: Liberation News Service, Montague Farm, and the Long Sixties*, 31-46.

[1034] See Ray Mungo, "Why Move? The Politics of Rural America in Our Age" 1968, Folder: LNS Related Materials, Box 3, John Wilcock Papers.

Very briefly, two versions of LNS existed: one in Montague (LNS-Mass) and one in New York City (LNS-NY). The latter, however, came to dominate as the former fizzled, a testament to broader attitudes towards the idea of the underground. LNS-Mass's response to the collective identity crisis of the underground was not common. In contrast, LNS-NY's response reflected larger trends in the underground press. They saw the new relationship between the underground and the establishment as an opportunity to reconceptualize the underground's political relevance. Thorne Dreyer, former editor of *The Rag* and LNS Staffer, wrote in December 1968 that the scene was evolving beyond the ideals forged in the early portion of the decade, which he found politically wrongheaded. As he put it, "The scene has changed...It occurred as individuals began to experience the emptiness of 'life style' (freakiness, dope) as a definition of reality. As people realized that you can't build a 'community' of beautiful people in a rotten capitalist society."[1035] Dreyer's critique of "community" building and "life style" politics is an indirect critique of the sort of underground prefigurative politics that LNS founders Mungo and Bloom espoused. He did not question the need for an independent and autonomous media institution – he still claimed "the mass media is the enemy" – but he did think its framing as "underground" had "outlived its usefulness," especially now that "every mass circulation mag reported on the glories (evils, it didn't matter) of dope and dope-crazed sex."[1036] He called for a new name and a new mode of political engagement: "as the old phenomenon evolved into a new one so will the name. Maybe we'll call it the

[1035] Thorne Dreyer, "Radical Media Conference," *Liberation News Service*, no. 123 (December 5, 1968): 28.
[1036] Ibid., 27, 28.

radical press, or the revolutionary media, or something else. It's a new thing and deserves a new name."[1037] His call to describe the community as the "radical press" or the "revolutionary media" reflects a turn away from longstanding subterranean ideals and one towards a new sense of militancy that characterized the underground press for the next several years.[1038] In this context, "underground" returned to its political roots, serving as a term to describe self-described revolutionary groups like the Weather Underground Organization. This sense of the word would come to dominate in the 1970s.

Both LNS-Mass and LNS-NY tried to maintain their hostility towards the establishment. If underground ideology first emerged in response to the limits of a then dominant radical paradigm, appearing as alternative to a communism that seemed increasingly untenable and anachronistic, such organizations repeated the process but in relation to the underground. Simply put, the political, economic, and cultural climate changed and these figures believed a new oppositional political and cultural language was necessary. The history of UPS offers another case-study in the reconfiguration of underground ideology. However, unlike the members of LNS, they did not seek a new means of rejecting the aboveground world when faced with the contradictions latent within their vision of the underground. They embraced their new relationship, even going as far as to shed the label underground.

UPS was formed in 1966 at a meeting of six underground newspaper teams who collectively decided that some sort of organization, even if it only functioned

[1037] Ibid., 28.
[1038] McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 140–71.

symbolically, could support them in the face of hostile forces and conditions.[1039] Founding members included *The Los Angeles Free Press*, *Berkeley Barb*, *East Village Other*, *San Francisco Oracle*, Detroit's *Fifth Estate*, and *The Paper* of East Lansing, Michigan. Multiple papers joined shortly thereafter, including *The Rag* in Austin. It adopted a range of policies dedicated to consolidating ties between various papers and to strengthening their financial positions. As UPS declared in ads that appeared in underground papers across the country, "[UPS] exists to facilitate the transmission of news, features, and advertising between anti-Establishment, avant-garde, new-Left, youth oriented periodicals which share common aims and interests."[1040] Members were expected to freely exchange subscriptions, publish UPS member lists, and agree to allow other UPS members to freely reprint material. Monies raised by the organization were to be split amongst members.

At first, the organization stumbled due to lack of funding and discipline: McMillian described it as a "chaotic and somewhat anemic organization."[1041] However, it quickly went from a ramshackle informal alliance of newspapers to a centralized organization that functioned not unlike most mainstream journalistic organizations once Wilcock and Forcade assumed central leadership of the organization in 1968. They rapidly began instituting policies to support UPS as an organization and to support its members. Much like COSMEP, Wilcock sought library subscriptions for UPS member

[1039] Underground journalists Thorne Dreyer and Victoria Smith, for instance, wrote of UPS's founding in 1969, "For some, it was intended as a 'pseudo event,' to fool the commercial press. To create the illusion of a giant coordinated network of freaky papers, poised for the kill." See Thorne Dreyer and Victoria Smith, "The Movement and the New Media," *Liberation News Service*, no. 144 (March 1, 1969): 15.
[1040] Underground Press Syndicate Display Ad, *The Rag*, April 10, 1967, 3.
[1041] McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 117.

publications: he established a service wherein libraries could purchase subscriptions to UPS member papers for fifty to one hundred dollars a year. Reportedly, it was a great success, netting three thousand dollars for UPS and its members.[1042] Forcade, who had a degree in business administration from the University of Utah, tasked himself with running the organization, applying all the skills his degree connoted. Working out of Phoenix, Arizona, he quickly turned UPS into a well-functioning business enterprise designed to ensure UPS's sustainability and thereby that of the community it represented. In the span of a year, as Glessing summarizes, he had "formed a corporation, arranged for a national advertising representative, compiled an underground press directory, put together a permanent library of underground periodicals, books, and films, and started *Orpheus*," a monthly magazine dedicated to covering the underground newspaper scene.[1043] Forcade's creation of a national advertising representative was probably the most significant. The representative, Concert Hall Publications, incorporated in Pennsylvania, helped underground publications raise a total of $40,000 a month in advertising placements by mid-1969, an amount that sustained a significant number of underground papers.[1044]

Via Wilcock and Forcade's efforts, UPS expanded and helped raise the national profile of underground newspapers, so much so that subterraneans needed to reconsider their relationship to the establishment. In that sense, UPS members addressed the same

[1042] Glessing, *The Underground Press in America*, 71.
[1043] Ibid.
[1044] Glessing, *The Underground Press in America*, 71–72.

questions that dogged LNS.[1045] However, rather than turn away from the establishment, the organization's leaders leaned into it. For instance, in 1971, Wilcock began soliciting establishment institutions like United Features Syndicate and King Features Syndicate to distribute his column, "Other Scenes," which focused on underground news and events.[1046] They turned him down. Forcade edited two anthologies of underground newspaper writing in 1972, both of which were published by so-called establishment publishers.[1047] These were not disingenuous attempts to exploit the community they represented via UPS. Rather, they believed such actions could benefit their community. This was a common position within the scene. As Dreyer noted in a report about a 1968 underground media conference, many subterraneans believed that "dealing with the mass media can be beneficial in specific situations," assuming they did not sacrifice editorial control.[1048] This resembled the position taken by COSMEP on the very same issue: what mattered to these figures was the sustainability and perpetuity of their community and the organizations that supported it.

While such a relationship to the establishment increased the underground's profile, it marked a departure from the anti-establishment hostility that characterized the early underground press. Members and leadership seemed increasingly skeptical of subterranean rhetoric and ideas, opting to describe their cultural world in other terms. For

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[1045] Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press*, 186–87.
[1046] James L. Freeman to John Wilcock, October 1971, Folder: Correspondence E – G, Box 1, John Wilcock Papers; Neal B. Freeman to John Wilcock, 6 October 1971, Folder: Correspondence E – G, Box 1, John Wilcock Papers.
[1047] Thomas King Forcade, ed., *Underground Press Anthology* (New York: Ace Books, 1972); Howard and Forcade, *The Underground Reader*.
[1048] Dreyer, "Radical Media Conference," 27.

instance, the introduction to a 1969 directory of underground papers described their community not as the establishment's antithesis, but as a parallel scene: "This is a list of what has been called the 'underground press.' Perhaps a better name would be the 'alternative press' since the publications listed here attempt to present an alternative to the establishment press." In a 1970 column, Wilcock expressed concern about the word's meaning, declaring it "over-used," something that "meant many different things to different people."[1049] Forcade addressed the same issue in more direct terms: "underground is a sloppy word. Underground is meaningless, ambiguous, irrelevant, wildly imprecise, undefinitive, derivative, uncopyrighted, uncontrollable, and used up."[1050] By its seventh anniversary in 1973, *The Rag* had stopped describing itself as an underground paper. As one of its writers put it, "7 years is a long time for a small community (formerly underground) paper to exist."[1051] Such a description presents "underground" as a trait or quality they had outgrown and left behind.

This growing skepticism led many to abandon the term "underground" entirely in favor of "alternative," including UPS. At a UPS conference held in the summer of 1973 in Boulder, Colorado, members suggested a change of name was in order. UPS had held multiple conferences by that point, but as underground newspaper editor and publishing historian Abe Peck notes, this one felt different to most attendees: it was preoccupied with professionalization and respectability.[1052] As journalist Tom Miller of the *Berkeley*

[1049] John Wilcock, "Under-Ground, N.," in *Countdown 1: A Subterranean Magazine* (New York: New American Library, 1970), 186.
[1050] Forcade, in *Countdown 1: A Subterranean Magazine*, 182.
[1051] Lin, "Thoughts on The Rag," *The Rag*, October 8, 1973, 3.
[1052] Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press*, 288–90.

Barb described it, "The two day conference was, if anything, the final plunge in the long dive from political flamboyance to economic stability."[1053] According to Miller, economic and political sustainability dominated discussion at the conference: the problem of financial security and government repression persisted. In the midst of this, "alternative" emerged as a popular substitute for "underground." According to Forcade, use of "alternative" piqued the interest of editors and journalists because they believed it less likely to provoke authorities.[1054] Journalist Chip Berlet even announced to UPS membership at one conference presentation, "the underground press is dead; long live the alternative press'."[1055] Shortly after the conference, UPS held a referendum on changing their name to the Alternative Press Syndicate (APS). Members overwhelming voted in favor of the change.[1056] The terms "underground" and "alternative" functioned as synonyms for the next several years, but the latter came to dominate and persists to this day.[1057]

UPS did not speak for all underground newspapers, but their embrace of "alternative" was representative of a larger shift in underground thinking away from its founding tenets. Miller commented on this shortly after the conference: "Watch when next year's dictionaries come out. Under 'press, underground' it will probably read:

[1053] Tom Miller, "Undergrounders: Editors Lift Up Corner of Rug at Denver Confab," *Berkeley Barb*, June 22-28, 1973, 2.
[1054] Armstrong, *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America*, 183.
[1055] Quoted in Miller, "Undergrounders: Editors Lift Up Corner of Rug at Denver Confab," 23.
[1056] The vote was decided by a wide margin of twenty to one. See "UPS Becomes APS," *COSMEP Newsletter* 5, no. 2 (November 1973): 1; Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press*, 290.
[1057] For instance, underground writers R. E. Maxon and A. D. Winans used "underground" and "alternative" as synonyms in 1973 and 1974. See R. E. Maxon, "Sex Paper," *The Rag*, February 12, 1973, 12; A. D. Winans, "Little Presses on Rise," *Berkeley Barb*, July 26-August 26, 1974, 38. On the "alternative press," see McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 172–85.

'small publications, usually political; assembled, produced and circulated clandestinely. Generic term, U.S. circa 1965-1972, now cons. obs.; further inf. See 'press, alt'."[1058] In abandoning the spatial metaphor, the community formerly known as underground gave expression to the new relationship between themselves, other media institutions, and the market. It signaled their rejection of the liberating possibilities of radical exteriority, and their willingness to situate themselves within the world they initially opposed. Underground hostility to the world of the surface had faded, As Miller wrote after the Denver UPS conference, "Four years ago a conference calling itself 'alternative press' might have attracted *The Nation*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Texas Observer*, and a few other periodicals but of course would have been scorned at by any self-disrespectful underground press office."[1059] Any sense of scorn was now gone. Now, such publications were welcome peers, not representatives of an alienating sphere. The underground newspaper world had ascended into the light, and what once aspired to be a radical world unto its own had become a niche within the larger media landscape. The underground press faded, but the alternative press thrived. As McMillian notes, alternative weekly papers were financially successful throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, sufficiently distanced from the raucous milieu they emerged from.[1060]

SURFACE LEVEL HOMESICK BLUES

Lahr's declaration of the underground's end in 1969 was a bit premature, but he rightly identified that it was changing. He was correct in claiming that its constitutive

[1058] Miller, "Undergrounders: Editors Lift Up Corner of Rug at Denver Confab," 2.
[1059] Ibid., 23.
[1060] McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters*, 180.

ideals could not persist and that the concept as a whole would transform into something new. When it did "end," it did not necessarily end "on the pages of *Vogue* or the Late Night News or at a New School Seminar" as he suggested in the concluding moments of his essay.[1061] It could have though, a consequence of the fact that the concept no longer signaled a hostile and radical distance from such institutions. The underground and the community that rallied behind it had surfaced, positioning itself within the world it initially rejected. It was not a criminal or deviant community any more. It remained off-beat, idiosyncratic, and at times offensive to all variety of parties, but its relationship to the market, to the state, and to various institutions they once denounced had irrevocably changed. At that point, it became a subsection of the establishment, a marketing segment or a community of consumers. Some continued to use the label underground, but it did not mean what it once did. This is what Lahr gestured at when he claimed in the conclusion of his essay that "its demise as a concept may yield a new, healthier synthesis."[1062]

This was not a result of mainstream agencies and institutions simply appropriating and exploiting subterranean styles, subjects, and forms, though that certainly happened. Nor was it a result of subterraneans exploiting their peers and their community, though that assuredly happened as well. It was a function of contradictions built within the idea of being underground in the first place. Underground institutions forged in the early years of the 1960s hoped to sever ties with mainstream America. They saw themselves as

[1061] Lahr, "The End of the Underground," 84.
[1062] Ibid.

inhabiting a criminal space outside mainstream America where new modes of being and new creative practices could emerge. However, they also wanted to expand that space: they wanted their community to grow such that it could sustain itself against financial insecurity and state repression. This process was impossible without forging clearly defined relationships with the aboveground, the overground, or the establishment, however subterraneans defined it at the time. As I have argued throughout, the flight underground always occurs within the logic of dominant culture: it is the embrace of criminality and the imagined space it inhabits as the surface world defines it. While subterraneans claimed radical exteriority and aspired to an almost utopian separatism, their world was always ensconced within dominant culture. The contradiction between this imagined location and this material location was pushed to its limit when institutions formed in the name of cultural autonomy expanded and networked to such an extent that any claim to inhabit a sphere radically exterior to mainstream society became impossible to sustain.

The three case studies analyzed in this chapter illustrate this process of transformation, demonstrating how various wings of the underground responded to it by either redefining the underground's constitutive elements or abandoning them. In either case, its meaning changed and it migrated into the sphere it initially rejected. Grove Press under Barney Rosset's direction first prefaced these developments. The company had long been a supporter of the underground, helping it achieve national prominence without watering down its substance, but its desires to expand initiated a series of events that repositioned the underground. Its "Join the Underground" campaign constructed the

underground as a marketing niche rather than as a deviant world, a characterization that meant access to it was easy as buying a book with the right colophon. When publishers and writers affiliated with little magazines of the Mimeograph Revolution formed COSMEP, they hoped to collectively survive: they wanted the underground to continue. However, their continued existence proved impossible without state support, a controversial compromise but one that many accepted as necessary, privileging the actually existing community they forged rather than the ideals of its founding. Consequently, anti-state hostilities dissipated within the literary underground, so much that use of the word "underground" in this context rapidly faded. The history of underground newspapers follows a similar trajectory, though one accelerated via political conflicts within that community. The emergence of institutions like LNS and UPS that hoped to facilitate that community's growth but in doing grew closer and closer to the world they opposed, a move that led some to retreat further underground. Others abandoned the underground's cultural dimensions in favor of a more traditionally political vision. Still more abandoned the concept in its entirety.

Of course, those who once rallied behind the subterranean banner did not disappear, and their works would go on to inspire artists and activists over the course of the 1970s and into the 1980s. However, the particular political and aesthetic imaginary that the spatial metaphor of the underground signified never again wielded the same amount or kind of social power that it had between the postwar era and the early 1970s. While during that era one could speak of "the underground," after it one usually needed

to deploy it as a different part of speech. “The underground” did end, but “undergrounds” would persist.

Conclusion – The Afterlife of the Underground: Undergrounds

The underground community that first emerged in the immediate postwar era and consolidated in the 1960s had fragmented by the mid-1970s, collapsing under the weight of internal conflicts brought about by their twinned and contradictory desires of expanding while also remaining ardently opposed to the rest of mainstream society. Those who were a part of the underground lived varied lives after its collapse. Some were memorialized, but most were forgotten. Some members of the hip underground like Jack Kerouac became canonized rebels, but its earliest advocates like Chandler Brossard and John Clellon Holmes have mostly been read only by specialists. Joyce Johnson's work went unremembered years, but underwent a revival in the 1980s. Most members of the underground continued producing the sorts of works they always had, developing their distinct political and artistic visions, albeit under very different institutional circumstances and in a world far less hostile to their point of view. Figures like Michael McClure, Jack Smith, and Jonas Mekas went on to become elder statesman in the history of experimental arts, touchstones for studies of that era's creative arts. Others like Ed Sanders became equally famous, though less studied by scholars. Some, like Douglas Blazek and Kirby Congdon, remained obscure, but continued producing work on their own terms. Some, like Barbara Rubin, fled the cultural world they helped found. She left New York City for upstate New York in the late 1960s, and reembraced a Judaism she

previously rejected, eventually converting to Hasidism in the 1970s.[1063] d. a. levy committed suicide in 1968. Others found success in related fields. Thomas Forcade, for instance, went on to found *High Times*, a magazine dedicated to anything and everything associated with marijuana. Such figures, however, were no longer part of an active creative community. Their lives continued to intersect in various ways, but it was not under the auspices of cultivating and inhabiting a shared cultural world premised on the valuation of deviancy or obscenity. That community – "the underground" – had ended.

That community was not even remembered as "the underground." In American popular memory, its memory became entwined with the mythic 1960s, a reductive vision of the era but one that has remained popular. However, that is not to say underground ideas or sensibilities disappeared. Though the underground of the 1960s never achieved its goals, its foundational tenets resonated with individuals and groups seeking ways to articulate a hostile relationship to dominant culture and the institutions that supported it. After the 1970s, underground no longer functioned as a proper noun, but it did function as a common one and as an adjective. The underground was gone, but its emergence and consolidation made it possible to talk about undergrounds or underground arts writ large. In this conclusion, I will briefly discuss this legacy of the underground, exploring the memory of the community that rallied behind its banner and how its sensibilities irrupted after its demise.

[1063] On Barbara Rubin's life after leaving the New York City underground, see Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film*, 49–52.

Despite being a well-known label that many cultural dissenters used to describe their community throughout the 1960s, the underground was not remembered as "the underground." That community was subsumed into other categories, most notably "counterculture," a concept first deployed and popularized by sociologist Theodore Roszak. His popular 1969 book *The Making of a Counter Culture* introduced the term to describe the shared culture of student radicals and hippies, two groups he argued were joined via their mutual rejection of technocracy.[1064] Soon thereafter, the idea of "the counterculture" spread widely, appearing in some of the first histories of the decade. Some outside the underground described it as "the underground," as was the case in poet and journalist Naomi Feigelson's 1970 book, *The Underground Revolution: Hippies, Yippies, and Others*, but her move was a rare exception to the dominant trend.[1065] For instance, though William O'Neill's *Coming Apart: An Informal History of the 1960s* (1971) uses "underground" a handful of times, it is subordinated to the category of "the counter-culture," which is the title of a whole chapter.[1066] Since the 1970s, the idea of "the counterculture" has been used to describe all manner of oppositional practices, groups, and ideas associated with the 1960s, most of which had little to no relationship to one another. As cultural historian Nadya Zimmerman has demonstrated, this has obscured the particularities of the vast number of movements that sprang up during that

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[1064] See Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*.

[1065] Naomi Feigelson, *The Underground Revolution: Hippies, Yippies, and Others.* (Funk & Wagnalls, 1970).

[1066] William L. O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960s* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 101, 204, 234, 241, 310. For his chapter on the "counter-culture," see Ibid., 233–71.

decade. [1067] This was certainly true of the underground, a fact attested to by the complete absence of scholarly studies about it as a broad and coherent movement. This dissertation has sought to remedy that.

It is not surprising that the underground was remembered in these terms. After all, the idea of a singular counterculture lends itself to mythologizing by homogenizing a diverse and heterogeneous milieu. Furthermore, "the counterculture" seems safer, readily associated with Flower Power and Woodstock rather than artists making sex films, shouting expletives, and advocating a variety of anarchist politics. When remembered simply as part of "the counterculture," many of the transgressive elements embedded in the word "underground" disappear. The fact that militant groups like the Weather Underground Organization came to be associated with the word "underground" in the 1970s likely aided this process.

Regardless of why "counterculture" ascended in American cultural memory, the abandonment of "underground" by its adherents almost assured that the community it signified would not be remembered in such terms. Many subterraneans thought their vision of the world was failing them, and moved on. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the fracturing of "the underground" was the result of subterraneans debating the fundamental ideas that had accrued around the word "underground" since artists, activists, and intellectual embraced the label in the immediate postwar era: liberating exteriority, the historical possibilities of criminality, an alternative society build upon

[1067] Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope*, 2–3. For more on the history and legacy of the concept of "counterculture," see Andy Bennett, "Reappraising 'Counterculture,'" in *Countercultures and Popular Music*, ed. Sheila Whiteley and Jedediah Sklower (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 17–28.

new principles, and cultural autonomy. Many argued that those ideas were unsustainable and politically ineffectual, that the underground as its inhabitants conceived of it was not up to the task of realizing its goals. While it once denoted a radical alternative to prevailing modes of political opposition, for many it seemed as outmoded and irrelevant as Marxism did to early theorists of the possibilities of underground life in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In a sense, subterraneans of the early 1970s reenacted the same processes of ideological disavowal that Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, early existentialists, anti-totalitarians, and amateur psychoanalysts went through in the immediate postwar era.

Those who rejected subterranean ideas might have been right. The underground was, after all, a failure: the obscene society it prefigured never came to be. That is not saying much, however: the same could be said of many of the imaginative and utopian projects inaugurated during the 1960s, especially those with grandiose goals. Perhaps this failure was unavoidable in the underground's case. As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, underground ideology was contradictory. The idea of "the underground" was dialectically entwined with the world it sought to reject, meaning its claims to radical exteriority were illusory. The flight underground always depended upon dominant assumptions about criminality and deviance. As is most evident in the history of the hip underground of the 1950s, subterraneans claimed the deviant world as it existed in the minds of those with political, social, and cultural power, operating on their terms and in their language, never breaking from the world as they hoped to. In many cases, subterraneans simply embraced stereotypes and proclaimed them in positive terms. The

underground's contradictions revealed themselves in the striking similarities between it and the aboveground world, especially its unrepentant masculinism. It that sense, its failure also marked the end of some forms of subcultural exclusion, a good thing for those marginalized within the underground. Perhaps underground ideas could have remained popular within dissident circles if subterraneans had not been so eager to expand their world, but that would have undermined the atypical activism that had characterized it from the very beginning. It is possible that subterraneans could have pushed through these contradictions and generated a new sense of the underground that broke with the ideological paradigms of dominant culture, but many abandoned the concept before that could happen.

That does not mean underground values evaporated, or that the word itself disappeared. As described in chapter one and demonstrated throughout this text, imaginaries are fluid and mutable, capable of being detached from their moorings and adopted, revised, and transformed. The ideas that first surfaced in the shadow of the collapsing American left, were built upon in hip novels, and later refined in mimeographed magazines, allegedly obscene films, and wildly creative newspapers inspired a new generation of artists over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. They adopted subterranean themes and modes of production, forging hostile relationships with mainstream society. The underground, it seems, animated a variety of undergrounds.

Take, for instance, the films of John Waters. Inspired by underground heroes like Jean Genet, Kenneth Anger, and Jack Smith, Waters was committed to exploring the various possibilities of "bad taste," embracing "trash" and "filth" in the same way

Sanders and levy embraced the obscene.[1068] His 1970s output, especially his independently produced 1972 film *Pink Flamingos*, released just as the underground was breaking apart, clearly demonstrates this.[1069] The film follows two families as they compete with one another for the title of "The Filthiest People Alive," a competition that results in all manner of perverse debauchery and violence. The film's concluding moments feature its star – the now legendary drag queen Divine, the "Jane Mansfieldesque blonde bombshell" with a "shaved hairline and excessive eye makeup" – eating a pile of dog excrement as her family watches. The film's embrace of "filth" carries forth the underground's embrace of obscenity. As Divine shouts near the film's end, "Filth is my politics, filth is my life!" In actively cultivating their filthiness, Divine's family remove themselves from mainstream society. They live in a sphere of their own, one of joy, enthusiastic mutual support, and surprising tenderness.[1070] In their "filthy" world, they refuse to bend to the will of straight society, and possess a degree of freedom other characters do not. Waters's next two films, *Female Trouble* (1974) and *Desperate Living* (1977) explored similar terrain, taking on the beauty of crime and the liberating possibilities of living amongst the criminally insane.[1071] Waters was not part of any self-

[1068] On the relationship between Waters's films and underground film of the 1960s, see J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 136–73; Jack Sargeant, *Deathtripping: The Extreme Underground*, Third Revised Edition (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 11–13.

[1069] John Waters, *Pink Flamingos*, DVD (New Line Home Entertainment, 2004).

[1070] As Walter Metz argues, Water's films frequently depict the "aberrant family" as preferable to the "seemingly normal bourgeois one." See Walter Metz, "John Waters Goes to Hollywood," in *Authorship and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 166.

[1071] As film critic Jack Sargeant describes these films, "*Pink Flamingos* was the first of what would become known as Waters' 'trash trilogy,' three films which follow an escalating theme of crime lawlessness, rebellion, sexual 'deviancy' and transgression. The second of the trilogy was *Female Trouble* (1974), a film which followed a deranged version of the rags to riches myth of the American dream,

defined subterranean community, but he carried forth its spirit and ideas. Underground was an appropriate way to describe his work. He acknowledged as much in 1973 when he responded to a journalist's question about how he classified his films: "Well, I think it's an underground thing although there really isn't such a thing anymore."[1072]

The Cinema of Transgression, a small film movement that emerged out of New York City in the 1980s offers another example of the underground's legacy. Here, filmmakers not only created works thematically consistent with those of filmmakers like Jack Smith and Barbara Rubin, they embraced their production practices and even identified themselves as an underground movement. Spearheaded by filmmakers like Nick Zedd, Richard Kern, Kembra Pfahler, Cassandra Stark, and Tessa Hughes-Freeland, the Cinema of Transgression produced films on little-to-no budget that self-consciously shattered political, religious, and sexual taboos.[1073] Take Zedd's 1992 film *War is Menstrual Envy*, a seventy-seven minute long collection of post-apocalyptic vignettes that features mutilation, mummies, close-ups of eye surgery, and performance artist Kembra Pfhaler simulating sex with some sort of tentacled creature. Zedd was the movement's most well-known filmmaker.[1074] In 1985, he outlined the movement's

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focusing on the criminal exploits of one Dawn Davenport (Divine). The last of Waters' trilogy of *Desperate Living* (1977) – a deranged fairy story in which hysterical housewife Peggy Gravel and her maid Grizelda flee to Mortville – a kind of Oz for the criminally insane – after murdering Peggy's dumb husband." See Sargeant, *Deathtripping: The Extreme Underground*, 12.

[1072] Danny Fields and Fran Lebowitz, "Pink Flamingos & the Filthiest People Alive," in *John Waters: Interviews*, ed. James Egan (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 29.

[1073] On the Cinema of Transgression and its influence, see Sargeant, *Deathtripping: The Extreme Underground*; Duncan Reekie, *Subversion: The Definitive History of Underground Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 187–99.

[1074] Sargeant categorizes him as the "Master of Transgression." See Sargeant, *Deathtripping: The Extreme Underground*, 47–84.

philosophy in the pages of *The Underground Film Bulletin*, a small magazine that would not have been out of place in the mimeograph revolution:

> We propose that all film schools be blown up and all boring films never be made again. We propose that a sense of humor is an essential element discarded by the doddering academics and further, that any film which doesn't shock isn't worth looking at. All values must be challenged. Nothing is sacred. Everything must be questioned and reassessed in order to free our minds from the faith of tradition. Intellectual growth demands that risks be taken and changes occur in political, sexual and aesthetic alignments no matter who disapproves. We propose to go beyond all limits set or prescribed by taste, morality or any other traditional value system shackling the minds of men. We pass beyond and go over boundaries of millimeters, screens and projectors to a state of expanded cinema.[1075]

Zedd's manifesto recalled both the anti-academic screeds of poets like Blazek and the gleeful embrace of obscenity found in the work of Sanders. He later explicitly linked such actions with the underground itself, identifying one of the constitutive elements of the underground imaginary when he said, "To me it's not underground unless it's transgressive."[1076] In classical underground fashion, he linked social and cultural transgression with new modes of being in the world, claiming that "the only heaven is the heaven of sin, being rebellious, having fun, fucking, learning new things and breaking as many rules as you can."[1077]

Punk rock offers yet another example of the underground's afterlife. Though early punks were hesitant to embrace the underground label, they nevertheless adopted its practices. In the mid-1970s, music venues like CBGB and OMFUG (short for Country,

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[1075] Nick Zedd, "Cinema of Transgression Manifesto," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 88. The manifesto was originally published under the name Orion Jericho in the second issue of *The Underground Film Bulletin* in 1985.

[1076] Jack Sargeant, "An Interview with Nick Zedd," in *Deathtripping: The Extreme Underground*, Third Revised Edition (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 81.

[1077] Zedd, "Cinema of Transgression Manifesto," 89.

Bluegrass, Blues and Other Music for Uplifting Gormandizers), and Max's Kansas City began consciously featuring bands that were not signed to the so-called "Big Six" major record companies – Warner, CBS, Polygram, RCA, MCA, and Capital-EMI – that controlled eighty-one percent of the American music market, attempting to carve out a space less restricted by American economic norms.[1078] Critics and journalists initially described the stripped down and often confrontational variant of rock and roll that appeared in such clubs in terms of the underground, though they quickly abandoned it. As philosopher and music critic Bernard Gendron writes, "'underground' was ultimately too generic a term to work as a satisfactory brand name" for the genre of music being created by bands like Television, The Ramones, Blondie, and the Talking Heads between 1974 and 1976.[1079] Nevertheless, their actions reflected the ethos the term previously signified. This was no accident. As journalist Victor Bockris has recounted, New York City punks looked to members of the hip underground for inspiration.[1080]

Though these punks did not embrace the underground label, a younger generation that came of age in the 1980s did. Like those punks before them, these Reagan-era subterraneans refused to participate in the established culture industries and frequently saw themselves as inhabiting a punk underground.[1081] Like subterraneans of the 1960s,

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[1078] Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 10.
[1079] Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, 261.
[1080] See Victor Bockris, *Beat Punks: New York's Underground Culture from the Beat Generation to the Punk Explosion* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000).
[1081] For instance, a 1988 photographic account of Washington D.C.'s punk scene was titled *Banned in DC: Photos and Anecdotes from the DC Punk Underground (79-85).* This sort of framing persists, especially among writers previously affiliated with or otherwise close to punk scenes in the 1980s. For instance, the language of the underground appears throughout Steven Blush's collection of oral histories by figures

they placed a premium on their distance from established record companies, and argued that musicians ought to embrace an artisanal mode of production, or as they put it, one had to "do-it-yourself." They formed their own record labels, secured their own record distribution deals, and booked their own concerts. Consequently, independently owned and operated record labels like Dischord Records in Washington D.C., Lookout! Records in Berkeley, and K Records in Olympia, Washington became cornerstones of regional scenes.[1082] Some were cautious of success, seeing it as an inevitable step towards incorporation into the dominant cultural landscape. For instance, in the early 1980s, Washington D.C. punk bands were infamous for constantly breaking up. Though such break-ups were usually the result of youthful squabbles, Ian Mackaye of the nationally known band Minor Threat saw it as a politically and culturally significant phenomenon: "It's kind of cool to break up, rebuild, and write a whole new set of songs. It humbles you, you never get too good, and you stay underground. In DC, right at the point when people start hearing about your band or you put out a record, the band breaks up. It keeps it really underground, gives room for a lot of progression."[1083] In this framework, staying underground was of the utmost importance. It was an ethical imperative that came before expansion, growth, or popularity, as it was the precondition for creative expression. Others thought similarly. Ian Svenonius of Nation of Ulysses, another band based in Washington D.C., declared in 1989 that "you have to try as hard as possible to be

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associated with punk music in the United States in the 1980s. See Steven Blush, *American Hardcore: A Tribal History*, 2nd Edition (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2010). See also Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*; George Hurchalla, *Going Underground: American Punk 1979-1992* (Stuart, FL: AK Press, 2005).

[1082] On punk economics, see Thompson, *Punk Productions*, 139–58.

[1083] Quoted in Mark Andersen and Mark Jenkins, *Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation's Capital*, Updated Edition (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), 95.

underground and not be assimilated."[1084] When punk became a mass media phenomenon in the early 1990s, such figures had to reckon with questions similar to those that plagued members of the Liberation News Service and Underground Press Syndicate in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

At the same time these young punks embraced the idea of going underground, some critics argued a new literary underground was on the rise. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, "zines" flourished in suburban and rural communities across the United States. In many ways, they were a modern incarnation of the mimeograph revolution: they were small magazines produced not with mimeographs, but with early word processors and copy machines. Media and cultural critic Stephen Duncombe defines them as "noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute themselves."[1085] Zines covered diverse material, often serving as platforms for the public expression of idiosyncratic individual interests.[1086] Duncombe saw them as constituting a distinct cultural underground, an alternative culture with anticonsumerist politics that might reinvigorate an ineffectual Left. Anarchist writer Bob Black saw them in similar terms, claiming that they constituted a new underground, one beneath any conventionally understood cultural underground. His 1994 book *Beneath*

[1084] Quoted in ibid., 294.

[1085] Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, 6.

[1086] As Duncombe writes, "the breadth of zines is vast and any effort to classify and codify them immediately reveals shortcomings." However, he does identify specific genres. They include: fanzines, which were dedicated to various popular cultural forms including science fiction, music, sports, television and film; political zines; personal zines that functioned as public diaries; scene zines that covered local and regional cultural milieus, "fringe culture zines" that explored paranormal and occult subject matter; religious zines, vocational zines, health and medical zines, sex zines, travel zines, comics, literary zines, and art zines. See Ibid., 11–13.

the Underground conceives of them as a community of "marginals" and "antis," descriptions that invoke traditional subterranean dichotomies, joined by "an aversion to lifelong locked-in servitude to any boss."[1087]

The films of John Waters, the Cinema of Transgression, punk in its various stages, and the proliferation of zines could all be described as "underground" but they were not part of a shared community, though overlap certainly occurred given the resonances between them. The word "underground" is functioning differently in these contexts.[1088] Underground here signifies a repeatable phenomenon or a descriptive term, not a historically specific imaginary that animated a distinct counterpublic. This raises a couple of questions, the first of which is whether or not the examples cited in this conclusion are properly or authentically underground given their distance from the particular community that identified as "the underground," especially given that I have argued strenuously throughout this dissertation that the term denoted a distinct social formation. I believe, however, that such a question misses a much more important issue. Regardless of whether or not these figures or movements are properly underground, the concept became linked to them either through their own efforts or by critics who saw them in such terms. Either the artists themselves or outsiders thought it was an appropriate means of describing their activity. This means that though the underground

[1087] Black, *Beneath the Underground*, 8.

[1088] Here, I am taking a cue from poet and critic Bob Perelman, who has made a similar observation about "avant-garde." As he writes, For Perelman, "avant-garde" is an "intrinsically unstable term in critical contexts." Describing his encounter with a call for papers for a special issue of the academic journal *New Literary History* dedicated to the avant-garde, he identifies three syntactically distinct senses of the concept: "'the avant-garde' (proper noun, sans capital), 'an avant-garde' (common noun), and the adjective ('avant-garde')." See Perelman, "My Avant-Garde Card," 879–80.

had ended, it provided a conceptual template that later artists, critics, and audiences could deploy and use to make sense of their relationships to forces, figures, and institutions they hoped to escape. The question to ask of these later undergrounds is not whether they are properly underground, but why this framing continued to make sense for cultural dissenters.

Here, I can only speculate on answers to such a question. Perhaps the Manichean logic built into the concept of the underground resonated with the ways these individuals already viewed American political, economic, and social life. Maybe romantic and political ideas about the historical possibilities of criminality remained appealing in a neoliberalizing nation without a substantive leftist movement or a militant working class. One could argue that transgression is still "cool" and that subterranean metaphors still convey it adequately. It is possible that the idea of underground culture is simply a residual effect of that burst of political and creative energy of the 1960s, one destined to fade as some emergent culture takes its place.

Any consideration of why these groups adopted the underground label must first grapple with the history laid out in this dissertation. Underground entered general usage in the United States as a way to describe obscure, anti-commercial, and transgressive cultural milieus and practices because multiple generations of artists had refined such ideas between the postwar era and the early 1970s. They did so in dialogue with the American Left, Cold War culture, and aesthetic debates shaped by both of these contexts. That means that the history of underground culture is a part of these three dialectically entwined histories: it is part of their legacy. This dissertation, in laying bare its history

has explored its hopes and its limits, especially those that contributed to the collapse of the community that coalesced around the idea of going underground. This last point is actually the most interesting to me: the underground's failure was ultimately generative. After all, had the underground succeeded, had it stuck around as a singular community, it is unlikely that the concept would have been detached from its moorings. The fact that the concept now floats freely through American culture and is part of its general cultural vocabulary means that it could combine with other political and aesthetic imaginaries, a process of adaptation and revision that could overcome the limits of the underground forged in mid-century America. Its adoption in other contexts suggests that this process has been long underway.

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